



The Apostles, the Servant Leaders
Maundy Thursday 2012
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Texts: Luke 22:19-24; John 13:2-5,14

Luke 22:19-24

And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!" And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this. A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.

John 13:2-5&14

During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him... **If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet**

They were a motley group; some might even say "ragtag band of brothers," these 12 men of the passion. Several were unschooled, simple fishermen by trade. One was a detestable tax collector, one a political zealot (or patriot depending on your point of view), one had a Greek name, and one was from the obscure village of Cana in Galilee. A couple of them were known hot heads that were extremely loud and boisterous. In this series of sermons, we've already heard about the traitor and the denier. By the way, most of us cannot remember all the names of the disciples.

But in many ways, they were a lot like us or we are a lot like them.

As the hours raced steadily toward Jesus' death, these men gathered with Jesus for the Passover meal and for a night they would never forget—a night we must never forget.

I. THE APOSTLES HAD THEIR FEET WASHED BY JESUS

Early in the evening, as the meal was being served, Jesus did something extraordinary. He took a towel, poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet.

It was quite common to get one's feet washed as they entered a home. After walking in sandals on dusty paths, a person could use a good foot cleansing. But, the person who did the washing was normally a household slave. In this case, Jesus, the Master—not to mention the Messiah and God's own Son—did the washing. Jesus did the work of a slave for His disciples.

What must these men have thought? They had followed Jesus not because they felt they deserved such favors from Him. But because He asked them to follow and because they believed—although sometimes with wavering faith, that He was the Messiah from God. Now He stoops to wash their feet.

Peter spoke what the others must have felt. **"No," he said, "you shall never wash my feet."**

But Jesus said it must be so. He was showing them how much He loved them, the kind of love that would lead Him to the cross for them and for the whole world. And He was preparing them for what He wanted to see from them too—and from all of His followers.

"I have set an example," Jesus explained, "that you should do as I have done for you." They too should wash the feet of others. That was a way of saying that they should be willing to serve others for no task was too menial.

II. THE APOSTLES ARGUED ABOUT WHO WOULD BE THE GREATEST

These unlikely men, minus the betrayer (who left shortly after this), were to be the leaders of Christ's church on earth. But they were to be servant leaders. They were to be "foot washers." And Jesus asks no less of us today, does He? He calls on us to serve, to "wash feet", in a sense. Foot washing is the job of a servant.

Did the disciples learn that lesson? Not right away! We learn that later in that very same evening they argued about which of them was to be considered the greatest. Jesus had, earlier, told them that He would die. Jesus had washed their feet. And they argued about who of them was the greatest!

Isn't that about what we might expect? How many times have you met a fellow Christian for the first time, and in short order, he or she was telling you (maybe boasting?) about all the things they had done at church: "I was president of the congregation." "I taught Sunday school for 15 years." "I served meals for all the funerals." "I served on every committee ever formed." "I created the best church support organization ever." "I was the best cook in my previous church and won ribbons at the county fair for my cooking."

You get the point don't you? Have you ever done that?

We serve, but we want to make sure others know we have served. We volunteer, but then we complain about how much we do and how little others do. We have ideas of how to do things, and we feel hurt if they are not done our way. We are never far away from wanting to be considered "the greatest." It's called self-righteousness, or work-righteousness or just plain shameless self promotion.

III. THE APOSTLES WERE THE FIRST TO RECEIVE THE LORD'S SUPPER

Jesus knew that about His disciples, then and now. So what did He do about it? He stayed the course to die on the cross for their sins and for ours. He continued to teach them, knowing that they would gradually catch on. He prayed an earnest prayer for them and for us that very night. And He gave a tangible expression of His forgiveness, a simple meal that we repeat to this very day.

Jesus gave them bread saying: "This is my body". He gave them wine. "This is my blood," And then He became explicit: "This is the body that I give for you, this is my blood shed for you. This I do so you may be sure you have the forgiveness of sins."

Jesus gave them and He gives us in the Holy Supper what paid out on the cross the very next day. We cannot explain it (real bread, real body; real wine, real blood—given for us and to us—for forgiveness of sin!). We just take His word on it. We rejoice in it. We come to receive it for our sure comfort. We come humbled by it and made more ready by it to serve.

What about the eleven disciples? Did they ever catch on? Well, we still might not readily remember all of their names. For they went out not to make a name for themselves (nor should we) but to proclaim to the world the only name given among us by which we must be saved. They carried the gospel message to the far reaches of their world: to Great Britain, to India, to Iran, to Greece, to Russia, to North Africa— just to name a few places. We don't know where all they went because the focus was on the Gospel not on their efforts, not their journey, not on their contributions, but on HIS (†) sacrifice for us.

They took huge risks in service. All but one of these men, we have reason to believe, gave their lives in service for the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are counted among the martyrs of Christendom. The last one was not executed, but he was exiled. And God used him that is John, to write a gospel, a series of letters, and the book of Revelation in the Scriptures.

It is safe to say that those men became the servant leaders that Jesus intended them to be.

Now Jesus turns to us. As He gives us again this evening His very body and blood for our forgiveness, will we do less than offer our bodies in return as living sacrifices to His service?

- Jesus comforts us; let us bring His eternal comfort to others.
- Jesus died for all the world; let us do our part in telling the world what that means.
- Jesus came as the Servant of God, and washed us clean from all our sin. Let us go from here and be Gospel servants sharing that Good News of forgiveness in Jesus to all people.

Christ has given His life as a payment in full for all our sins and in Him there is true forgiveness and peace. May His body and blood strengthen and preserve you unto life everlasting. In Jesus name, amen and amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
AMEN.