

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Second Sunday in Lent, March 4, 2012

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 387:1-6, 401, 97, 14, 640.

Lessons: Isaiah 42:1-8, Philippians 2:1-16, Matthew 12:14-21.

Sermon Text: John 13:1-17.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Today we see Jesus presenting himself as a servant and encouraging all believers to also serve one another. Paul echoes that idea of service in Galatians 5:13-14: ***"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"***

Please listen as we see

JESUS WASHING HIS DISCIPLES' FEET

- 1. Jesus shows and proves his humility in serving them.**
- 2. The meaning of this service for our lives.**

"It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. The evening meal was being served." But not all was well. ***"The devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus."*** Those words tell us that Jesus is going to be betrayed.

But look at the confidence that Jesus had. Scripture says ***"Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power."*** Jesus knew what he could do – he had the power to do anything, even find a way to escape the punishment awaiting him. But he also knew what he must do. If all power was put into Jesus hands, he could easily have found a way to escape the punishment that was going to come to him but he did not. This is the punishment for sins which we deserve but was heaped upon the sinless Son of God. Do you remember how he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane? He prayed: ***"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."*** Luke 22:42 He was not looking forward to his suffering and death, but he gladly and willingly did what his Father wanted. In Gethsemane, he was deeply involved in his suffering. He was even then suffering the agony of hell. Remember that he did not just suffer the pains of hell on the cross.

Jesus also knew ***"that he had come from God and was returning to God."*** Jesus knew the sufferings and death that were going to happen to him. But he also knew the glorification that was going to come to him – the resurrection, the ascension into heaven and sitting at the right hand of the Father.

Then we have a most remarkable picture of Jesus' humility. He ***"took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him."*** Sandals were the common footwear in Jesus' time. Indoors people usually went barefoot and sandals were taken off at the door and their dusty feet were washed. The host often provided a servant to wash the guests' feet.

If there were no servant or slave present, the task would naturally fall to the humblest in the group. But these men, far from feeling humility at this time, had been quarreling as to who should be considered the greatest. Luke tells us ***"A dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or***

the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves." Luke 22:24-27

Jesus then teaches by example, giving a remarkable picture of serving. Jesus put water into the basin commonly used for that purpose, and then very deliberately began to wash the feet of His disciples and to dry them with the towel wrapped around him. Here we see the Lord, the very Son of God, in the role of the humblest of servants, performing the work of a slave; with the disciples sitting around in silence, really unable to understand. But Jesus went right on down the line, omitting no one.

He comes to Simon Peter. Peter, in what we could consider his typical impulsive, outspoken bold, self-confident manner, asks him ***"Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"*** Jesus replied, ***'You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.'*** The Lord tells him that he did not know, did not understand at that time, the real significance of Christ's humble task. But the time would come when the meaning should be made clear to him.

Isn't this typical of Jesus' disciples, even us? We don't always realize what God is doing to us and for us, but someday we will understand. Perhaps that understanding will not come until we are sitting at Jesus' feet in heaven.

Peter did not want Jesus to wash his feet and was pretty adamant. We read: ***"No," said Peter, 'you shall never wash my feet.'*** [But] ***Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.'***

Only he whom Christ washes and cleanses from sins can have part with Christ. Then Peter thinks he will do the Lord one better. ***"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, 'not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!'"*** Peter immediately became overenthusiastic.

"Jesus answered, 'A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.'" For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. Believers who have been baptized have had a bath. We have been washed with water and the Word of God. Even believers who have not yet been baptized have been cleansed of sin, washed with the forgiveness of sin, made pure, clean and whole in the blood of Jesus Christ.

In the middle of this foot washing, as he is answering Peter, he drops another hint about his betrayal by one of them. Today of course we read Jesus' words and wonder 'Couldn't they see what was happening? Didn't they listen to him? Didn't they hear what Jesus was saying?' But we have to admit that we don't listen very well either, do we. Whether it is listening to someone near and dear to us, or listening to the Word of God in a sermon, or in a Bible class, or in our devotions at home, or in catechism class, we don't listen carefully. Even in Sunday school we don't always listen carefully. We like to goof off. We don't pay attention. And we dare not simply shrug our shoulders and say 'the devil made me do it.' We are responsible for our own sinning.

Since the washing was only symbolic, it was not necessary that the whole body be washed with water. The person who has been touched by the cleansing and sanctifying power of Jesus' redemption is totally clean and holy in the sight of God. His disciples were clean. They had, by faith, accepted the redemption in His blood. They were justified from their sins. And the sanctification of their lives must continue, as the washing of feet indicated. They must repeatedly and daily wash away and remove the filth of the sins that would persist in clinging to them and in soiling their flesh and their conscience. All believers need this daily cleansing from sins. It is necessary for believers to daily ***"throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."*** Hebrews 12:1

But in declaring them clean, Jesus deliberately makes one exception. There was one among them, Judas, the man who would betray Him, who was not clean, who had spurned the redemption and sanctification the Savior offered, who had denied the faith by planning to deliver his Master into the hands of the unbelievers.

"When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. 'Do you understand what I have done for you?' he asked them. 'You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.'"

He asks them about the meaning of his action. Did they understand what he had done? Not really. The Lord's own action had been symbolical, but it also served as an example which they should follow. They honored him with the title of Master or Lord, and he had every right to these names. He is the Lord God, come from heaven; He is the great Teacher of all men, for all time. If he did not consider Himself too good or too dignified to perform this humble service for them, they, in turn, should not hesitate about following His example. They are to apply His example to the acts of love and service which they owe to their neighbor, and to all acts of kindness, love and what we today call charity – doing things for others.

This applies to everything we do for the care of fellow Christians and for our ‘neighbor’ – that is, for all mankind. The humblest work of love for one's neighbor should be performed with all eagerness, for no disciple of Christ may presume to be above such works of service. Christians are still living in the world and must battle continually with their sinful flesh. The greatest love and the spirit of Christ is shown in this, that one forgives his neighbor his daily trespasses, and endures his faults and frailties. Jesus also tells us to serve one another. Mere head knowledge of the wish and will of Jesus has no value in the kingdom of Christ. It is the application of Jesus' knowledge expressed in actions which shows one's faith. The person who practices the love which has come into his heart by faith in such deeds of mercy and charity and kindness as are shown in the Word of God will be truly blessed, that is, happy, in the sense of being assured of the approval of Christ.

He now says that since I have washed your feet ***“you also should wash one another's feet.”*** Is he literally talking about foot washing? The Pope, every Maundy Thursday picks 12 people and washes their feet in a display of great humility. This is the head of the Roman Catholic Church, the man who calls himself Christ's vicar on earth, the one who claims leadership of 1,300,000,000 people on earth. He washes their feet dressed in his grand robes, using a pitcher and basin that looks like gold, assisted by several others. Perhaps there have been Popes who have been genuinely sincere in humbling themselves by washing the feet of a dozen people, but a Pope's other actions and words don't support that idea.

So should we literally wash one another's feet? Should we have a basin of water at the entrance to our church? Is this the way the minister should greet people as they come into church? Well perhaps if we lived in a dusty climate and all wore sandals. If we didn't have the opportunity to take daily showers and baths, as we came into a sacred place of worship perhaps we should have some kind of foot baths. Beyond the literal foot washing is a tremendous amount of service. Jesus wants Christians to serve. Jesus wants Christians to put one another first.

So how can we serve one another? There are always things we can do around the house of the Lord. Straightening things up, cleaning things, preparing things. There are always things we can do for fellow Christians. Helping the ill, those less fortunate, those who have difficulty getting around. Scripture is filled with ways that we can serve people. Our world and our communities are filled with ways that we can serve people.

When it comes to serving one another, we could think of the second table of the law. Jesus summarized this as ‘love one another as yourself’. We can look to the Scriptures for guidance. We can look to the law of God in all of its applications for ways in which we can serve our fellow man. We can see examples and illustrations in the Bible for ways in which we can exercise and practice and live our faith.

“Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” God blesses our hearts, for we know that we are pleasing our God when we serve others. Such fruits of faith will bless us, too. “May our labor Praise Thee, Lord, and serve our neighbor.” Amen. (The Lutheran Hymnal, 235)