

## Serving and Being Served John 13:1-17

We've heard our new officers answer lots of questions today. We've heard them all affirm their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. We've heard them promise to follow Jesus, and to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination and love. And we've all promised to follow as they lead us in the way of Jesus Christ.

But what do all those promises mean? What does it really mean to follow Jesus, to serve people with love? Well, today's passage goes right to the heart of the matter. For here, Jesus gives us the best example of Christian leadership.

For how does John begin this passage? "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end." And how did Jesus do that? By taking up the basin and the towel, by stooping to wash the feet of His disciples. As He bent to wash their feet, as He performed the act of the lowest servant, Jesus loved His own to the end, to the fullest extent possible.

So, what does this say about our own service to others? Jesus here reminds us that the essence of Christian love is humility. The one who truly loves puts the needs and even the desires of the beloved ahead of his own needs, his own wants, and even his own dignity. True love involves nothing less than the willingness to do whatever is necessary for the good of another, regardless of the cost to the self.

But what does this have to do with Christian leadership? Only everything. Remember, Jesus is the Sovereign Lord of Heaven and Earth, the King of Kings, the Lion of Judah. If He could wash his disciples' feet, shouldn't we expect those who lead His Church to lead in the same way? After all, Jesus said, "A servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him." And so, whether demonstrated by a husband toward a wife, by a parent toward a child, or by an elder or deacon toward a church member, Jesus shows us that Christian leadership is fundamentally a matter of humble service. And as He has given us an example, let us do as He has done.

I don't suppose any of us would disagree with any of this in the abstract. The problems, of course, arise out of our specific relationships. Sure, we know we are supposed to love and serve the brethren. But what about those who don't act very much like brethren? What about those who act like they don't love us at all? Do we have to love them too, and in such a humble way?

In fact, the histories of our lives are made up of people who call themselves Christians but who have disappointed us, or who have betrayed us, or who have neglected our friendship no matter how hard we have tried to reach out to them. We've all been hurt by those whose

profession of faith seems inconsistent at best and incredible at worst. How can we possibly love people like that?

But have any of us been as hurt as Jesus was by Judas? Oh, yes, Jesus knew what Judas was going to do that very night. Jesus knew the pain that He was about to go through, the torture that Judas would set in motion as soon as he walked out of that upper room. Yet Jesus bent down and washed Judas' feet, just as he washed the feet of all the other disciples. Jesus humbled Himself before the one who would betray Him.

And come to think of it, didn't the rest of Jesus' disciples betray Him, too? Didn't they all leave Him to the tender mercies of the chief priests and the Pharisees and the Roman legions? If Jesus could humble Himself before people like this, is there anyone that could possibly be unworthy of our service? Could there be anyone too unclean for us to wash their feet?

Well, I don't know about you, but this kind of love isn't just difficult for me. It's completely beyond me. When I see Jesus loving in such a radical way, in such an unconditional way, I know I just can't do this.

And so it's easy to sympathize with Peter who, when confronted with his need to be washed, embraces that need. "Don't just wash my feet but also my hands and head," he says, and how right he is. In fact, in response to Peter's confession, we might expect Jesus to do some teaching about how Peter and all the rest of the disciples are so sinful and selfish that they would all run off and leave Him that night. We might expect Jesus to take Peter up on that extra washing – surely the one who would deny Jesus three times that very night could use a little more scrubbing.

But instead, Jesus says to the Peter, "You are clean." Jesus says to those faithless, fearful eleven who will leave Him in the lurch, "You are clean." How can this be true of those who would betray Him that very night? How could that be true of any of us? And how could Jesus say such a thing?

He could say the eleven were clean for the same reason that He can say that about any of us who trust in Him and who follow Him, however inconsistently. Jesus declares all His people clean, not because of anything we have done or left undone, and not because He has served our physical needs, washing our feet with water. No, Jesus could declare sinful men like these to be clean, Jesus can say the same thing about everyone who comes to Him as Savior and surrenders to Him as Lord because He has laid down His life for us.

And He has done this purely by His grace. He does this purely through the same unconditional love that allowed Him to wash the feet of Peter, that allowed Him to wash the feet of

Judas, that allowed Him to wash not only our feet but our souls white and clean in His own precious blood.

We celebrate that love today as we come to this, the Lord's table. We come, not because we are clean, but because we need to be washed in the water and the blood of the Rock of Ages. We come, not because any of us elders, deacons or church members love and serve others the way we should, but because Jesus has loved us, because Jesus has served us, because Jesus has given His life for us.

So let us come with reverence and gratitude, singing all the stanzas of our communion hymn, hymn 220.