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John 13: 1-17

Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet

13 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the utmost (end). ²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' ⁷Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' ⁸Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' ⁹Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' ¹⁰Jesus said to him, 'One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.' ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'

12 After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you?' ¹³You call me Rabbi (Teacher) and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Rabbi (Teacher), have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Feet. Pretty feet. Photogenic feet. Well formed feet. Feet with perfectly manicured toes. Feet that don't smell. Feet with no calluses, corns, or bunions. Does this describe any of your feet? I didn't think so. Nor did they in the 1st century, when the preferred mode of transportation was walking, and the



preferred footwear was sandals. Can you imagine what 1st century feet looked like at the end of each day? Can you imagine all the dust, grime, and who knows what else would have accumulated between the toes of somebody treading those dusty roads?

Yes, I'm sure it's just as gross as you're imagining right now. So, it is no wonder that when somebody threw a 1st century dinner party, just like today you'd take your shoes off at the door of somebody's house, back then you'd have your feet washed when entering someone's home. This was a customary and ordinary thing to do. However, as important as it was, it was sort of filthy work to clean up those grimy feet, and so the work was only ever done by a slave, and in the patriarchal society of the day, usually a female slave.

So, what's Jesus doing washing the feet of the disciples? Peter was probably wondering the same thing when he freaks out as Jesus begins to wash his. Here's why, Jesus was their Rabbi, they were his disciples. And so for Jesus to wash their feet was a *very* big deal!

To be a rabbi was a highly respected role. Young Jewish boys aspired to become one. It took years and years of training and aspiration to pull it off. Rob Bell describes the process in his Nooma video, "Dust." Here's the how the process to become a rabbi went in the 1st century: First the boys go to school from ages 5-10 and during that time they memorize the complete Torah, which are the first five books of the Old Testament, the books of Moses - *memorize!* By 10 years old, once the boys have mastered those, many of the boys would have encountered enough difficulty that they'd have realized that this wasn't for them, and so they would leave school and go into the family trade or apprentice to someone. A select few, however, who had displayed outstanding talent would be tested by the rabbis for their talent. If they had a complete mastery over the Torah and had memorized the books well, and showing promise, they would continue their education. They would commit to another 5-6 years of study. During that time, they would memorize the rest of the Old Testament. That's right friends, again, *memorize*. These books comprise more than 2/3 of our modern bible. This was as great a feat then as we imagine it to be now. These young men were no slouches.


Now at this time a critical point was reached. The application process to become disciples. They would seek out a noted rabbi whom they wished to follow

A few days ago many of you gathered here in our sanctuary and we spread ashes on our foreheads in the shape of a cross. We intoned the ancient words of tradition, "from dust you have come, to dust you shall return." We pondered the impermanence of life. We remembered that we are mortal beings and our time is short. We remembered that we are fashioned out of the very dust of the earth – the atoms and molecules of the environment form us. And to it we shall return.

I was pondering this the other day when I was watching a science program about the formation of the universe. And as I watched I pondered the question of where all this came from. Science tells us that the stuff of the universe came from the Big Bang, an event 13.8 billion years ago when the universe began in a massive explosion of energy. From this explosion the first atoms formed in great cosmic clouds of dust. Composed primarily of the lightest elements, hydrogen, helium, and lithium they formed enormous diffuse nebulae that characterized the early galaxy. Through gravity these clouds coalesced into the first stars, as the gases collapsed and nuclear fusion ignited. These stars burned the fuel of the light elements that composed them, and through fusion of these atom's nuclei the smaller elements became fused into larger ones. Two hydrogen became a single atom of helium. Two helium fused together became an atom of beryllium. The berylliums combined into oxygen and so on.

These ancient stars burned furiously as they consumed their store of initial fuel. This process continued for billions of years until they reached a critical point in their lifecycle when they had consumed all of their fuel. At that point the stars entered the end of their lives. Stars like ours would expand into a massive red giant that would be a hundreds of times its original size, before exploding outwards into a gaseous nebula, leaving behind a small core not much larger than planet earth called a white dwarf. Other, much more massive stars than ours would end their lives by first expanding into massive red giants, which are the largest objects in the universe before exploding in one of the most energetic events in all of cosmic history – a supernova. In a supernova, the contents of the stars inner core explode, spewing its contents outwards into a giant cloud of dust.

The curious thing about these supernovae is that we're learning they're the only cosmic mechanism that we're aware of that generates enough energy to explain the existence of any of the heavier elements. Any element heavier than



to the utmost or the highest, which is an alternative to saying loving them to the end. This is Jesus, knowing that this is the last night he'll spend with his beloved disciples, taking the time to make a grand gesture of love for them. He wanted to make a display of his utmost love. He wanted them, when they looked back to those last few hours they had together, to know beyond a shadow of a doubt, that they were beloved.

Gross, dirt and crud caked, bunioned, callused, and bruised feet. Jesus took off his robe, wrapped a towel around himself, and washed them all. Not only did the rabbi lower himself to wash the disciples' feet. The Son of God, Immanuel, God-with-us, washed their feet. Jesus, the messiah, took his towel and basin of water and washed the feet of his rag-tag bunch of normal dudes, fishermen, tax collectors, and tradesmen become disciples - most of them probably all of 15-20 years old. A bunch of kids, really. Once Peter understands what is really going on, and that the son of God is about to wash his feet, it's no wonder he responds the way he does. Wouldn't you have the same response? Jesus was reversing the roles! This wasn't right, for the Messiah to wash the grimy feet of his disciples.

But friends, we have been washed, haven't we? Here at this place, the baptismal font. We were washed clean of our sin and made children of God's family. We were claimed as God's own. As Paul writes in Romans 6, In our baptisms we were united with Christ in his death – we died to our sin and were united with Christ in his resurrection. We were cleansed, made new, and freed from sin. We became, “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 6: 11).

In this foot washing the disciples were reminded of Jesus' claim on them. He had chosen them to be his disciples. They were his. He loved them to the utmost. He was willing to humble himself as a servant to make his point known. They were not going to escape the point with this extreme gesture!

But it doesn't stop there! Those guys in the upper room with Jesus that night weren't the only disciples. Guess who the disciples are now? That's right all of us. We are his disciples now. And Jesus was emphatic about what has to happen next. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater

than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them." (13: 14-17). If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Do you remember a movie where someone made a grand romantic gesture to show how much they loved someone? You know like the classic 80s love story of relationship, heartbreak, and making up, "Say Anything?" Do you remember when John Cusak's character, who's trying to get back together with his ex-girlfriend played by Lone Skye, and how he surprises her one night? He stands outside her bedroom window in her driveway next to his car, and he's hoisting an old 80s boombox above his head blaring the classic Peter Gabriel song, "In Your Eyes." It's a grand romantic gesture that she can't help but notice.

The world needs the people of God, who have been loved by God in Christ Jesus, to go forth into the world in his name and make grand gestures of love for the sake of the gospel. Sort of like the equivalent of hoisting a boombox blaring love songs for the world. This is the message of the foot washing.

I see the crying need for it all over the place, don't you? We saw it last fall in the aftermath of hurricanes in Texas and Puerto Rico - the need for God's people to pull together in love and charity and rescue and assist in need. We saw it especially last week with the events in Florida. The world is desperate for God's people to gather together in the name of Jesus to make grand, extravagant gestures of love that leave the recipients stammering in amazement. The world is crying out for the people of God to love.

Where are we failing to love right now? Who are we letting down? Who needs God's love to be made real in their lives, without doubt, without question? What's holding us back? Why haven't we taken off our robes and grabbed our towels and gotten busy? Who needs to hear, and see that good news, and know that it is real not just for you, but for them too?

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

Alleluia and Amen.