

## **“Faith to Serve”**

18 April 2019: Holy/Maundy Thursday

Salado UMC—Salado, Texas 76571

Preaching Text: John 13:1-17

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**“The service you do for others is the rent you pay for the time you spend on earth”**

**(—Mohammed Ali).**

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Hear the evening lesson:

**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 end. 2 The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, 4 got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 5 Then 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.**

**6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” 7 Jesus answered, “You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” 8 Peter said to him, “You will never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.” 9 Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” 10 Jesus 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.” 11 For 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? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. 14 So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. 15 For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. 16 Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. 17 If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them (John 13:1-17).**

John’s Gospel offer us a sterling example of how Jesus communicated with his disciples. *“And during supper Jesus . . . got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel.”* After some table talk with Peter, Jesus explains to the disciples exactly what he is doing. (Some people need to have everything explained.) This is Jesus’ teaching: *“I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.”*

Travelers and guests expected a way to wash their feet during Jesus’ time. Hosts would either provide water in a basin or have a slave/servant wash their guest’s feet. It was simply good hospitality.

After a travelers' journey over hot dusty roads, foot washing was also hygienic. Yet, hosts never washed guest's feet—NEVER—never! Foot washing was either a self-service venture or usually a task for slaves/servants. So, when Jesus began to wash the disciple's feet, we see why the disciples squirmed and Peter argued. Jesus did the unthinkable. But Jesus' example made a point.

Christians know that God calls us to share our resources—time, talent, and treasure. Yet we live in a consumer society—and it is not getting better—rather our society seems to be consuming the consumers. What will it be like for our children and grandchildren? Our task is to be the best example that we can be. After all, people learn 80% of what they acquire by watching others rather than listening to them.

To give our hard-earned time and resources away is a counter-cultural act. We say by giving that we believe what scripture teaches. Our society teaches us to look out for ourselves. We are in a competitive battle at school, at work, and among our friends. Culturally we are always about being number one, having the best, and winning. Sharing does not seem to fit into our culture's program. Of course, every now and then, people moved by compassion will give to a particular cause—hurricanes, 9/11, and tsunamis come to mind. Yet regular systematic giving to serve other's needs does not seem to be our culture's priority. But then along comes Jesus—Messiah and Savior—and Jesus kneels and plays a servant's role. Isn't that just like Jesus?

What are we teaching the generations who come after us? Are we teaching our children by our example that we believe the way Jesus lived and taught was the most important lesson life can offer? Or are we teaching by our example that it is most important in life to keep up with the Joneses or the Smiths? Deep in our heart of hearts, we all know the answer to these kinds of questions. But our culture, such as it is, imitates Israel's chasing after false gods. Our culture seduces us from what we know is right and just and good. Jesus reveals a servant's heart as he stooped down to wash the disciple's feet. We show the servant's heart when we attend to our promise to support Christ's church and its ministries with our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. Maybe we don't get our hands quite as dirty as they did in the olden days, but the gifts we offer are as important today as they ever were.

No one can tell you how to respond to the gospel. Yet, we can pray that those who confess Christ in our congregation will join many others in becoming servants of our society's last, lost, and least. We can choose to be the person our grandmothers wanted us to be; or our dominant social order can con us into following "the culture crowd." This cultured path Jesus teaches leads to the destruction of our souls.

Recognition is a first step as we manage the gifts and graces God gives us. Authentic Christians recognize that God owns everything. No earnest Christian intends to be a poor steward. But our surroundings, values, and companions press us to lose our way. Too soon we dissolve into a culture of buying and selling.

Several years ago I heard a motivational speaker discuss how people forget what they know is right and true. Her analogy made enough sense to share. The analogy described how one might boil a frog. She said that if you threw a frog into a pot of boiling water, something predictable happens. The frog simply hits the hot water and skips out. This is pure survival instinct. So, she then asked: "How can you boil a frog?" She then shared a procedure.

She said you put a frog into a pot of lukewarm water. Then you place the pot over a low flame on the stove. Soon the water gradually heats up. The frog thinks it is in something like a Jacuzzi—content

and enjoying the experience. However, before the frog knows what is happening, he is in water that makes him so relaxed that he does not want to get out—and the flame continues to heat the water. Eventually it boils—and so does the frog!

We are like frogs and our culture is like water. The flame of consumerism finally makes us so comfortable that we couldn't get out if we wanted. Jesus taught us that one way out of this trap is to become a slave/servant of others. Remember when he said: *"I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."*

This week I pray that we examine our servanthood as Jesus is our example. God will help you. Amen.

Let us pray:

**O God, help us remember that although we live in a comfortable culture, sometimes we forget that you have given us it as but an environment in which to live. Remind us once again who really is the font of every blessing. Amen.**

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