August 4/5, 2012

Serving Savior

Simply Jesus Series
John 13:1-17
Pastor Mark Kremer

I'm sure that you have, like we have, watched the Olympics over the last week and you just can't help but feel the intense pressure that comes on these individual athletes when they step onto the world stage by themselves in some of these events. All eyes are on them and all of these months and years of preparation culminate in that moment. And one of the things that I'm always curious about is how do they maintain control? How do they prepare themselves in the days and hours leading up to that one moment when everything they've worked for is on the line? And that took me to thinking about Jesus and the fact that, as we've been reading through the Gospels, we get the sense of Jesus coming to do something very significant, very important. And as we've learned more about Him, as He's explained why He's come and who He is and what His mission is, we realize this is *the* moment in world history that the entire weight of the world, of all of human history, of the human condition, is all coming to bear on Him and this anticipation of this moment that's about to come and descend upon Him, when He will bear the sin of the whole world on Himself. Everything ever committed in the past, everything yet to be committed in the future, all of that, all of the punishment and judgment for all of that sin will rest on Him in this moment. How did He prepare Himself? What did He do in the hours leading up to that moment?

Well that's what John invites us to take a look at, to come inside the inner circle of Jesus on the last night before He was arrested, before He was tried, before He would go to the cross. And John invites us into this very intimate, personal moment with Jesus, where we see exactly what He's doing in the moments leading up to the cross. Turn with me this morning to John, Chapter 13. John 13 begins a five chapter explanation, invitation into the last hours that Jesus had with His disciples. It is the most intimate, really, look at Jesus and what it meant to relate to Him personally, to be close to Him, to hear His heart. And if you're following along in our reading plan of the Gospels this summer, this is where we're going to be reading this week as we conclude our reading plan for the summer. So you're going to be reading these last chapters of John and I hope you just really enjoy and engage in the intimacy of these chapters. This is where it begins in John 13. Verse 1:

> **Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them[l]to the end.** (*NASB, John 13:1)

We see here the setting, it's the Passover. It's not insignificant at all that Jesus would go to the cross during the Feast of Passover, which celebrated God's deliverance of His people out of the bondage and slavery in Egypt. And how did He do that? He did that by having them sacrifice a perfect, spotless lamb and put the blood over the doorpost of their house so that when the death angel came to bring judgment on evil and sin, he would pass over wherever the blood was. And every year the people of God celebrated that moment in their history when God had delivered them out of evil, out of bondage and slavery. And so it is no coincidence that the one who John the Baptist called "*the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world"* would actually sacrifice Himself, be sacrificed during the Passover Festival. This is the hour, it says, this is the moment all of human history hangs on His work in this moment. Now it says here that *He has loved those whom God had given Him, those who were His followers He loved*. And it says—the very last phrase—that **He loved them to**

the end. Actually, a better translation would be He loved them to the fullest possible extent, to the greatest extent He loved them. So what we're about to witness, what we're about to see in this chapter, is a demonstration of the extent of God's love and that's what unfolds before us. Verse 2:

> **During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him, *Jesus*, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.** (Vs. 2-5)

One of the things that we have seen as we've gone through the Gospels is that almost every act that Jesus does: physical, miracle, thing that He does, not only meets a real need in the moments but it also symbolizes something greater—a spiritual truth or reality that's going on at the same time. And Jesus has just this way of taking the particular, practical action that He's doing: healing someone, making a blind man to see, and giving to us a bigger spiritual picture through those practical actions. So this text not only gives Jesus washing the disciples' feet, but also there is rich symbolism here. He's communicating to us something even more significant, more important about Himself and what He's come to do as you read through that. So that's what we want to watch for. We want to see and understand that symbolism. One of the things that you have to wonder about—that gives us a hint at that—is all of the detail listed here in verses 4 and 5. It says He *got up*, that He *laid aside His garments,* that He *took up a towel*, He *girded Himself*, He *poured water into the basin* and *began to wash the disciples' feet* and *wipe them with the towel*. And you have to think, "Why would John give us all those details, like just step by step by step what Jesus was doing?" I think what's being symbolized here is all of the activity of Jesus in bringing salvation to mankind and the language rings really true to what we know about Jesus and His coming to earth. He got up from the seat of authority and power, from the throne that He sat on in Heaven, and He laid aside His glory and He entered into the human condition as a man. He girded Himself with humanity; He took the basin and the towel and He Himself did all of the work necessary to bring salvation. It's pictured here in these very specific words. But let's look for just a minute at the practical element of what's going on here.

Now again in this particular era, when you walked on dusty streets, there was very little if any pavement. You walked on dirty roads and you walked everywhere and you wore sandals. The practical fact of the matter is: feet were very dirty and very stinky and something had to be done about that. And this was a task that simply had to be done. It was something that happened as you would enter into any home. But it was an extremely menial task because of the fact that it had to be done over and over and over again. It was a smelly job; it was not a job that anybody wanted to do. In fact, within a Jewish community, they would have only had a Gentile slave wash the feet of the people who would come into a home. It was the lowest of the low: washing stinky feet. This is the ultimate dirty job if you want to think of it in that way. And you have to wonder, "What was happening here," because it says *during supper* Jesus got up to do this. Typically this would have been done *before supper*, as you sort of entered into the house. But here it's during supper and you have to wonder, "Did the smell get so bad that Jesus just got up and decided to wash feet?"

Now, I live in a house with five boys and let me tell you, there are a lot of dirty, stinky feet at my house and there are times when it's just so overwhelmingly putrid. We've had our boys stick their feet out the car window as we're driving just to be able to survive, to get home. Smelly, dirty feet were a practical reality in this world and, typically, whoever was the person who hosted the party or

the dinner would have had a slave wash the feet of the guests. But here they've just borrowed this room; there is no host. So here's Jesus, in the middle of dinner He gets up and He, Himself, begins to wash the disciple's feet. Verse 6:

> **So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter." Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part of Me."** (Vs. 6-8)

Again we have Peter being the spokesperson for the group, but you get the picture now of Jesus going from disciple to disciple, kneeling down in front of them, taking the towel and the basin of water and washing those smelly feet. And I don't know what the reaction of the others was, but when Jesus came to Peter, Peter says, "*Lord, Master, King, you're going to wash my feet?"* Peter was absolutely taken aback. This was not something a Lord, a Master, something that someone in authority, someone who is powerful, someone who should be looked up to, would do. "Lord, You? My feet?" And Jesus responded and said, "*Peter, you don't really realize right now what I'm doing.*" In other words, Jesus is saying, "*I'm washing your feet, but there's something even greater here that I'm doing. You don't understand it now but you will understand it."* And Peter said, "Never! Never are you going to wash my feet." It's absolutely inappropriate; it's absolutely unacceptable that the Master, the King—Peter had declared Jesus to be the Messiah—it's unacceptable to Peter that the Messiah, the King, the Creator of the Universe come in the flesh would wash his feet.

But Jesus answered and said, "**If I don't wash you, you have no part of Me**." Now I don't think Jesus was saying here, "If I don't get a chance to wash your feet, you're out of here! I mean your feet, Peter, are so stinky I'm kicking you out! If I don't wash your feet, you're unacceptable here." No, Jesus, again, is using the washing of feet to symbolize the fact that only Jesus can wash away sin. Only Jesus can take away the guilt and shame and the ugliness and the dirt of sin. The incurable disease of sin that we have from birth can only be dealt with by one person and Jesus looks Peter in the face and says, "If I don't wash you, you'll never be a part of the kingdom; you'll never experience life. I am the One who has to wash you!" And Peter got that. He got the fact that he wanted to be with Jesus. I mean Peter, if nothing else, he was hungry to know God, to be with God, to walk with Jesus. So verse 9:

> **Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, *then wash* not only my feet, but also my hands and my head."**

In other words Peter says, "Dunk me, Lord; wash me from head to toe then. If I have to be washed by You in order to have life with You, to be with You, then wash all of me! Wash me from head to toe." Peter was hungry, desiring to be with Jesus, having come to know him. Verse 10:

> **Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all *of you*." For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean."** (Vs. 10-11)

Again, this is rich with symbolism. Jesus is saying, "Now hold it, Peter. On the practical level you've taken a bath. You're clean everywhere; it's just your feet that are dirty; just let me wash your feet, okay? I mean, let's not get crazy here. I don't have to give you a whole bath here in front of the whole crowd here tonight; you just need your feet washed." But He's also speaking in a much deeper and symbolic way by saying, "Once I've cleaned you, you're clean. You don't need to

be bathed again because when I've washed you, your sins are washed away. You're white as snow. You're absolutely justified before God. You're holy; you're righteous because I've washed you. And so, Peter, you don't need a bath over and over and over again; you just need your feet washed." In other words He's saying, "You know, you're already clean; you're already justified if you believe. When you believe in Me, and, Peter, you do believe in Me, you're washed already. But, now what you need to do is just be cleaned up from time to time. You know, the parts that get dirty need to be cleaned." I think what He's saying here is, "I've come to justify you, to wash you once and for all, to declare you right and holy before God. That's what Jesus is going to do through His death and resurrection."

But He's also saying: after that—after you've believed—there is an ongoing confession and an acknowledgement of sin in our lives and coming back to Jesus to be cleaned up, based on what He's already done. That's sanctification; that's the process of us becoming more and more like Jesus. But once you've been cleaned by Him, you have no need to be cleaned again. He can wash you completely; He can take all your sin away. He symbolizes that here in the washing of the disciples' feet.

Interestingly, both in verse two and here again in verse 11, Judas is mentioned. And Judas is one of those very intriguing and sad stories in the whole of the Gospels because Judas was a part of the daily life with Jesus. He saw everything the other disciples saw. He saw every miracle; he experienced every miraculous thing. He heard every word that came out of Jesus' mouth. He was hanging around the light; he was in the presence of the light. But Judas never entered in; Judas never believed. Jesus said, "You're all clean except for one. He's not clean," because He knew that Judas had not believed, had not embraced Jesus as the Savior, as the Messiah. Now Judas gave a pretty good show. Nobody else knew. In fact, as Jesus would go into some detail about one of the disciples betraying Him, the disciples all looked at each other trying to figure out who was going to do that. I mean, Judas really put on a very good face. From the outside he looked like a true believer but, when the moment came, when he had to absolutely depend only on Jesus, he decided to try to save himself because I think Judas saw what was coming. Judas knew that Jesus was going to be killed and Judas didn't want to have to be killed himself, so he went out to try to find a way to save himself by betraying Jesus. But in the end, as we come to the end of the story, we find out that Judas actually lost his life. He lost everything! He lost eternal life. He went out into the darkness and he never came back to the light. He didn't embrace Jesus; he didn't get washed by Jesus. Verse 12:

> **So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments, and reclined *at the table* again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done for you?"**

Here we see now the reverse of the detail that we saw in verses 4 and 5. Jesus came, laying aside the glory of Heaven, entering into humanity to take up the basin and to do the work of redemption and salvation. Now, here, He pictures that work as finished. It's complete; it's done; so He takes back His glory, His robes and He takes His seat at the table, symbolically showing us that when His work on the cross and the resurrection is done, He'll return back to the right hand of the Father and resume His place as Lord in all of His glory. I love the question—when He sat back down He said— "**Do you know what I have done for you**?" I think that's exactly the question that God's asking us this morning because I think, in order for us to really understand who Jesus is, we have to put ourselves in that room with these disciples. And if you would picture yourself as one of those twelve seated around that table, and here comes Jesus—the one you know is the Lord of the Universe, the Creator of all things, the long anticipated King, Messiah, Savior—and He comes one by one and kneels down in front of you and looks up into your eyes and you are looking into the

eyes of the God of the Universe and what do you see in His eyes as He looks into your face? You see love; you see a willingness to pay the ultimate price to have a relationship with you forever. You see God looking at you and saying, "Please let Me wash you; let me wash you! I love you! There's no other way for you to be freed from your sin and guilt and shame unless you let Me wash you! Will you let Me wash you?"

Perhaps this morning there are people here who know about Jesus but you've never asked Him to wash you. This morning He's looking right at you and what you're seeing is the full extent of His love. This is a Savior who would go to the greatest lengths imaginable in order to forgive your sin, in order to have you enter into the kingdom and experience abundant, eternal life. "**Do you know what I've done for you?"**

About twenty-five years ago, maybe thirty years ago, a group of us invited an elderly gentleman who was a philosophy professor at a Christian college in Minnesota—well respected, a well-known thinker who just had tremendous insight and wisdom into God and into life—just a sage. And we had lunch with him and had a great conversation. At one point someone asked, "What's the most profound thought you've ever had about God? What's the most profound thing that fills your mind or has filled your mind about God?" And there was a pause and then he began to tremble just a little bit and then a tear began to come down his cheek and he said, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

There is nothing more profound; there is nothing more important than that you would look in the face of Jesus and see His incredible love for you. And I would ask you, "Why would you *not* invite Him to be your Savior?" What would keep you from asking Jesus to wash you, to cleanse you? What would keep you from embracing Him as your only hope of salvation? Why? Would it be ignorance? Is it because you just really don't know Him well enough? He's laid His life out here for us in the Gospels. We've been reading it. Don't let ignorance of who He is and what He's done keep you from coming to be cleansed. Is it pride? Could it be that we're so proud, so self-sufficient, that we would prefer to try to earn our way to God, to do it ourselves, to make ourselves presentable because, frankly, it's just too humiliating to have to ask somebody to wash me? Could it be shame? Could it be that there have been so many things that we've done in our life that we've come to a place to believe that we're beyond hope, that no one could love us enough to wash us? "God could never forgive me!"

This morning I want you to picture yourself seated at the table with these disciples and the King of the Universe on His knees before you, looking into your eyes with the greatest offer that's ever been offered to any human being—that of forgiveness and eternal life. And all you have to do is embrace Him and say, "Wash me...wash me." "Do you know what I've done for you," Jesus says. He's come to wash us; He's come to give us life.

But there was more that He wanted to communicate to those disciples, those who had already believed and we see that in the last few verses.

> **You call Me Teacher and Lord (**Jesus says)**; and you are right, for *so* I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master; nor *is* one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.**
>
> (Vs. 13-17)

To those who believe, who have already been washed, Jesus uses this moment to say, "What I have done for you, what I have modeled for you, the example I have set for you—of humbling myself and doing the menial thing and serving others with my life—is what I'm calling you to do. I'm calling you to wash one another's feet. I'm the Master; I'm the Lord and, if I wash feet, you're not greater than I am, are you? So then, you ought to wash feet. You ought to follow in my footsteps; you ought to follow my example and wash the feet of others. Now the question here—and I think the church down through the centuries, through millennia has wrestled with—is: "Is He talking about actually washing feet?" Well, that was symbolic here of the dirtiest, most menial task and act of service you could do for another person in Jesus' day. But, frankly, our greatest need is not to have our feet washed. You know, we do a pretty good job of that ourselves. We live in a completely different time and place. Maybe at my house there's a need for feet to be washed but typically that's not really how we serve. There are churches that practice foot washing and really it's more of the symbolic thing. I've been in India and every time we go to India, everyplace we go they wash our feet. It's very, very, humbling to have these brand new believers get down and wash your feet. It's just a unique and amazing experience.

But I think really what is applicable to us is: what is it that we can do to serve one another in the most practical ways, to meet real needs—even if it means that it's a menial task that socially may make us look less? But, because of our security, because of our identity, we know who we belong to; we know where we're going; we know that we are rightly positioned with God because we are in Christ. We can serve and do the most menial things to help one another and serve one another—and that's what Jesus is calling us to do. "Follow my example! Empty yourself; disadvantage yourself to give advantage to someone else within the family of God." Here He was speaking particularly of how these disciples would treat one another and, believe me, they got it! They got it because, when you read in the Book of Acts, after Jesus ascended and the Spirit came, what marked the early church was the love they had for one another and the way they served one another and cared for one another and it was the most attractive thing to those on the outside. They were so drawn to these people and the love they showed to one another that they were willing to listen and hear the message that they had to speak and proclaim.

Tertullian, one of the church fathers in the 3rd century, 200 and some AD, said that the communities around Christians often would brand the Christians with this label: *See how they love one another*. In fact the rapid spread of Christianity through those centuries, as it just grew from this tiny little mustard seed to this incredible movement that literally changed cultures and nations, that movement was sparked primarily because of the love demonstrated among the Christians for each other and for others outside the faith. It was the practical way they served and loved and helped one another, willing to humble themselves to do whatever was necessary to help people around them. And I believe that God is calling us who are believers to follow in His footsteps. He's our role model and, if Jesus was willing to get down and do the lowest of tasks out of love for His disciples, are you and I willing to do the most menial of tasks to serve and love the people who are in the community of faith and the people who are out in our community—both?

I believe that requires us to listen carefully to the Spirit of God. And I must say that I have learned more from my wife in regard to this than from anybody else I've known in my life. Because my wife makes it a habit when she goes to prayer and spend time with God each day of just listening and asking God who is it that He would lay on her heart or mind that might need an encouragement, that might need some help, that might need a touch from her? And she does it. And I watch her, week in and week out disadvantage herself to advantage others by the prompting of the Spirit of God.

Now there are formal ways that we can get involved in ministry and serving one another. Those are all good but I think much deeper than that this should be the overflow of our experience with Jesus, having been washed by Jesus, having been served and loved by Jesus. The overflow out of our heart would be, "God, who should I love? Who should I serve? How can I help? It doesn't matter what the task; it doesn't matter how lowly, how menial; it doesn't matter what it is. I'm willing to do it because you wash feet; dirty, stinky feet are not beneath you. So nothing you call me to do will be beneath me. I will do it as an act of love, to disadvantage myself to advantage a brother or sister. What a challenge! What a challenge for us who are believers to follow in His footsteps, to follow His example, to give our lives away as He did.

Our Father, I pray that this morning You might speak to any heart that's in this room that has yet to embrace You as Savior, to ask You to wash them. We have seen the extent of Your love, a willingness to go all the way to the cross and bear our judgment. Why would we not embrace a Savior like that? God, would there be people here this morning who would embrace You as Savior for the very first time? And for all of us who have embraced You, we are challenged; we are challenged to walk in Your steps. As Scot McKnight said, "Followers of Jesus follow Jesus." God, help us to follow you to the fullest extent, even to lay down our lives for others. Bring to mind exactly how you want us to that this week and every week we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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