

Get a Towel. Wash Feet!

Jesus washed his disciples' feet: John 13:1-20 & 1 Peter 4:7-11.

While I was studying at a seminary in Chicago, I worked customer service at Sears. I learned "the customer is always right." Customer service is necessary – not because companies really care about people, but because companies want and need profits. (Chick-fil-A really cares about people and God is blessing them with profits.) The motive behind most commercial (marketplace) customer service is self-interest - profits and survival. Customer service in the church is done with a different motive. It's Jesus Christ who is always right.

In John 13:1-20 Jesus demonstrated the heart and attitude of a servant.

Jesus Knew & Loved (13:1-5)

Consider all the things Jesus "knew." This knowledge empowered his stunning act of service and this knowledge empowers our service. Christ knew who he was and where he was going, and for us to serve effectively we must know who we are in Christ and where we're going. Knowing who you are in Christ provides the desire and power to serve.

1. Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father (13:1).
2. Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything, and he knew that he had come from God and would return to God (13:3).

If you know you have come from God; that you are a planned and wanted child; that God loved you before you were born and planned to give you a spiritual rebirth into his family, then you will serve joyfully. If you know you are returning to God when you die because your sins have been forgiven, then you will have no problem getting a towel to wash feet.

Jesus, knowing these things... got up from the table (rose from supper)... and did what?

- Jesus got up from the table and boasted about everything he knew. "I'm the smartest guy in this upper room. I'm omniscient. I know all the mysteries of the universe. I created each one of you. Come and wash my feet!"

- Jesus got up from the table and demanded that the disciples serve him. “My feet are dirty, so which one of you disciples would like to wash my feet. I am your Teacher and Lord. Serve me! I will give one of you the privilege of washing my feet, and then I will let you sit at my right hand in my kingdom.”
- Jesus got up from the table and passed out swords and told the disciples to prepare to fight against the corrupt Jewish politicians and the Romans. “Let’s fight against this corrupt Jewish Council and these Roman dogs occupying our land. ! It’s time to liberate Israel and make me the king like David.”

Jesus got up from the dinner table and did something that totally shocked the disciples. Jesus did something that overturned the world system. Jesus took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, poured water into a basin, and washed the disciples’ feet. (Jesus took off his suit, got into some work clothes, and washed all the dishes.)

When you enter someone’s house you take your shoes off. Don’t get dirt on the clean carpet. First century people had the same practice. When you entered someone’s house as a guest, you took off your sandals, sat down on a stool by the door, and a servant washed your feet. It was the job of a servant!

[Story: When my family was in Beijing we visited the 2008 Olympic facilities - the Bird’s Nest. Afterward we ate in a restaurant next to the Olympic stadium with a foot massage place. Olympic athletes came here to get foot massages. We sat in very comfortable chairs. The Chinese servants came dressed in 2008 Olympic clothing with towels and hot water thermoses. My servant poured hot water into a basin, put in a tea bag, and then asked me to test the water. It was too hot, so he poured in some cold water. When the water was tolerably hot, I soaked my feet for about 10 minutes. Then I got an excellent foot massage. The massage was painful and ticklish at the same time. We paid each servant 20 yuan. (They only got about 2000 yuan a month from the government.) I told my servant he could make a lot more money in the US as a physical therapist.]

There is one more thing Jesus knew.

Jesus knew Satan possessed Judas to betray him: 13:2, 10-11 (18-19): ² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him... ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not

every one of you.” ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

Jesus washed his feet anyway. This was one last chance for the *self-serving* Judas to humble himself before the *self-giving* Jesus. This clearly reveals what Satan thinks about serving others. Satan is the enemy of our service to Christ. Satan wants to exploit pride and greed in our lives and keep us from humble service to Christ and others.

This also clearly reveals the love of Christ: 13:1: *Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. “To the end” means to the utmost or fullest. It’s like Jesus said, “We’ve spent three years together and you know I love you, but you haven’t seen anything yet. I’m going to show you love that will blow you away! I’m going to show you the full extent of my love. I’m going to show you how far my love will go to seek, save and serve you. I’m going to show you how deep my love will reach down to pull you up.”*

Has any person, parent or spouse, ever shown you the full extent of his/her love? No, because every person is imperfect and flawed. I cannot show my children or my spouse all the love they need. Only Jesus Christ can show you love like you’ve never know before; the love you really long for.

The foot washing has a dual significance.

Jesus’ Warning to Peter’s Resistance (13:6-11): ⁶ *He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?”* ⁷ *Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.”* ⁸ *Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.”* *Jesus answered him, “If I do not 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, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.”* ¹¹ *For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.”*

Why did Peter resist Christ washing his feet? Maybe pride. Maybe shame. Maybe pride to cover his shame. Jesus warned Peter of the danger of his resistance. Peter

was arrogantly and ignorantly resisting his own salvation. Peter wanted Jesus to give him a complete bath! That would happen later after the resurrection.

Jesus said, "If I do not wash you, you have no share/partnership with me." Jesus meant Peter would not share in the benefits of Jesus' sacrifice, and no place among his people. When Jesus said this he connected the foot washing with his blood cleansing them from sin. Jesus' foot washing service showed the full extent of his love because it symbolized the cleansing and redeeming power of his blood. Jesus showed his disciples (and us) how his death was his greatest service to them (and us) by washing away their (and our) sins. If we haven't been cleansed by Jesus' blood then we don't belong to him and we have no share in his eternal kingdom.

When Peter resisted Jesus' foot washing he demonstrated the pride of people who have false confidence in their ability to save themselves; that is, people who deny and resist their need for divine cleansing.

Jesus continues to serve us, wash our feet, by forgiving our daily sins. Our daily sins are like dust on our feet. [¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean..."] Our bodies are clean, our sins are forgiven and we have eternal life, but we still get our feet dirty every day. I get my feet dirty every day and Jesus graciously washes me again when I confess and ask him to clean me. Read 1 John 1:9.

Jesus' Example: 13:12-17: ¹² *When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."*

For a Christian, service is a way of life, not an option. Christ's call to follow is a call to serve. Any time we serve someone else we are washing his/her feet. Our service is a weak demonstration of the full extent of Christ's love, but a valuable demonstration nonetheless.

If you are a new Christian and new to service: You don't serve to earn your salvation. Your service is a grateful response to salvation. Service is saying "Thank you" to Christ.

If you believe in Christ and have served a long time: Don't link your service to God's love for you. Your value to God is not in your service to him. God loves you the same whether you've served many years or are unable to serve. Emil Shen of WCEC was very active serving the EM, but then became debilitated by MSA (Multiple System Atrophy). He struggled with not being able to serve. Did God love him less because he couldn't serve? Was he any less valuable to God? NO.

How do we serve? 1 Peter 4:7-11: ⁷ *The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.* ⁸ *Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.* ⁹ *Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.* ¹⁰ ***As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:*** ¹¹ ***whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.***

We serve according to our gift. These gifts are not natural or learned talents (but talents can be used for service). These are gifts received from the Spirit – spiritual gifts received by God's grace (**grace = χάρις/charis, gifts = χάρισμα/charisma**). Every believer has a gift. You aren't too young or old to receive and use your gift. There are a multitude of speaking and serving gifts. This is the meaning of "God's varied grace." (*Varied* = many colored.) Speaking gifts of preaching, teaching, encouraging, and evangelizing. Serving gifts like hospitality, greeting, worship leading, etc. Some seem less like a gift and more like something anybody can do – washing dishes, sweeping floors, cleaning bathrooms, etc., but whatever the service it is done by strength God supplies. (I'll do a sermon on spiritual gifts another time.) I see the youth serving!!

The motive to serve – Christ's example.

The gifts to serve – God's manifold grace.

Fictional story: *Museum of the New Jerusalem*