

Lent: A Time For Renewal of Servanthood

Matthew 20:25-28

February 22, 2012

Ash Wednesday

Our country is currently focused in on the presidential election. Some people have complained about our president having too much power and want to elect a new president because he will do what's right with that power. Other people support the president and don't want to elect a Republican because he will do what's wrong with that power. The truth of the matter is that, no matter whether a people are Democrats or a Republicans, they are all seeking power. They all want to rule. And that is normal for this world: we naturally want power and control.

Think of different situations in your life where there are struggles for power and control. Parents and children struggle for control. Parents have the power and want to be in control of their children. Children want the power and behave badly to try and get it. With teachers and students, the struggle is the same. Husbands and wives often fight to see who has power and will control. Boyfriends and girlfriends can do the same. At our jobs, the struggle is there. Workers and bosses fight for power. UNIONS and MANAGEMENT fight for control. Even in church, there is struggle for power and control. Will the pastor decide all things or will a church board be in control? Do you fight for control in any of these situations?

Jesus' disciples did. Jesus had two disciples named JAMES and JOHN. One day, their mother approached Jesus with a request: "Jesus, when you become king, command that my two sons be next to you - one on the right and one on the left." She thought Jesus was going to set up a kingdom here on earth and she wanted her sons to be important assistant-kings to Jesus. The other disciples heard this and they were upset. Why? Because they disagreed about her concept of power and kingship? No. They were upset because *they* wanted to be important in Jesus' kingdom as well.

Jesus calls them all together and says, "If you want to be important in *my* kingdom, then you must become a servant. If you want to be first, then you must be slave for others." Jesus calls His

disciples to become servants, not bosses; slaves, not masters. He calls you and me to do that, too. You know what it means to be a servant -- serving or help other people unselfishly and cheerfully. We may do that *at times*. But Jesus calls us to *live* as servants always. Can He be serious? Serving all the time without complaint, with no limits, and no time off?

You may think that it is easy for Jesus to say, "You must serve all." After all, He is already Lord and King. It would be easy for Him to tell others to serve. But Jesus did more than *talk* about serving. Jesus *did* serving. On the night before Jesus died, He and His 12 disciples met in an upper room for the PASSOVER supper. Someone was not there -- the servant who would wash their feet. Long ago, people walked on dusty roads and their feet became dirty because they did not have shoes, but they had SANDALS. When they entered a house, a servant would wash their feet. This was a dirty job for the lowliest servant. When Jesus and His disciples met, there was no servant. Someone would have to wash the feet before they could eat though. Everyone waited. None of the disciples volunteered. They didn't want to do that dirty work. That was not an important job. That was not an appropriate job for assistant-kings in Jesus' kingdom. The food was getting cold. Finally, someone moved. He tied a towel around His waist, poured water into a bowl, and began to wash the disciples' feet. Who was it? It was Jesus, the Son of God and King of the Universe.

When Jesus was finished, He asked them, "Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord', and that is right because I am your teacher and Lord. Now if I, your Teacher and Lord, have washed your feet you also should wash one another's feet. I have given you an example. You should do the same as I have done for you."

Wow! Washing feet? We don't have servants to wash our feet today. We don't need them. But Jesus is calling us to become servants and do the lowliest work to help other people. But that is hard. It is hard when the work itself is hard. It is hard to serve others especially if they don't appreciate it. It is hard to serve when we have to give up a lot of time and effort to help a family which has problems, a friend who is suffering, a child with bad behavior. It is easier to wait and let other

people do it. It is more pleasant to let other people serve us instead of serving them. We enjoy people noticing us and applauding our efforts. Serving may mean no one noticing and no one caring. And there is no pressure in our world to become servants. Instead, our culture encourages becoming rich, important and letting other people serve us.

Lent is a time for renewal of our Christian life. It is time to change our attitude about serving. Jesus calls you and me to become servants and humbly serve one another. He has taught us that. He was an example of that. How can we become servants likewise? We need more than His words (teaching) and His example to become servants. Our sinful self rebels against serving. We need His power and strength to accomplish that. Jesus was able to become a lowly servant because He is the Son of God and He loves all people. He is able to change us to become like Him and serve humbly.

Jesus served His disciples and washed their feet, but He washed far more than that. Our lesson says, “the Son of Man (Me) came into the world for what reason? For people to serve me? No. I came to serve people and give my life to save many people.” Our world says that you are born, you live, and you die - period. So you have to enjoy yourself and do for yourself now. Jesus came down from heaven, was born, lived serving people, and died serving people so that our life would mean more than that. Jesus washed feet clean from dirt - true. But more importantly Jesus washed us clean from sin. He died so that we could have forgiveness for all our sins and become His children. Jesus rose from the grave to give us a new life - here on this earth and forever in heaven. We can now serve because we are His children and belong to Him. He frees us from the selfishness and self-centeredness of this world. He freed us for a life of service to one another, to our neighbors, and even to our enemies.

What does this mean for you? Children, it means serving your parents. Parents, it means serving your children. Students, it means serving your teachers. Teachers, it mean serving the students. Husbands, it means serving your wives and wives serving your husbands. Congregation members, it means serving each other here – people who have faith and are members of our church.

It also means serving those people who do not yet have faith in Jesus and are not members of our church. It means members serving their pastor and pastors serving their members. Why? You serve, not because it is a duty or an obligation. You serve because Jesus served you first. He has renewed you to serve. Serving is a way to show your new life and to give thanks to Jesus for His service to you. Serving means imitating Jesus who came to us, knelt down to serve us, and loved us enough to die on the cross. So also we also go to other people, humbly serve them, and love them no matter what.

This is not easy. We too easily think of ourselves and wait for other people to serve us. We often need to repent and become renewed again. And the power to repent and become renewed - Jesus gives to us again and again. He calls us to repent through His Word. He washes us clean from our sin through our baptism. He gives us power through that baptism to become servants once again. His Word teaches us how to serve and encourages us to do that. He feeds and strengthens us to serve in the Lord's Supper where gives us His body and His blood to forgive our sins and support our faith.

We have many symbols for our Christian faith in our church. We have crosses which represents Jesus' death on the cross – the focal point of our faith. We have many symbols for the Lenten season in our beautiful purple Lenten paraments. Maybe we should have one more symbol to represent our Christian faith and the Lenten season: a picture of a towel and a bowl to represent humility and servanthood. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, humbled Himself for you. He came to serve you by giving up His life on the cross. Now, He calls you to serve the same. May Lent be a "Time for Renewal of Serving" for you. Let that renewal begin at the cross. For here, Jesus served us and He helps us to serve others. He will give you the towel and the basin. He will show you where to serve. And He will go with as you serve. Amen.