

"Those Who Sat At Table With Him"
John 13:1-17

April 17, 2014

Maundy Thursday

Sometimes the best way to teach is not with lecture, but with action. Jesus had to resort to this teaching method with His disciples as they sat together around the Passover table on the night before He died. Was it because He was trying to teach them something difficult? No. After three years of teaching, these disciples just didn't understand. They had tuned Jesus out and were just not listening to His teaching about life in the Kingdom of God. On the night before Jesus died – when He needed their support the most – the disciples were arguing among themselves about who was the greatest – the most important.

When we read this, we are shocked at their behavior. We are critical of their pride and self-centeredness. They had learned nothing about this in the past three years. Who was most important was an important question for them. One time they asked Jesus, "Who is the most important in the kingdom of heaven?" Jesus put a child before them and said, "If you don't become lowly like a child, you won't go to heaven."

Another time, they were traveling to Capernaum and were arguing about something. When they arrived, Jesus asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" They were embarrassed and did not answer because they had been arguing about who of them was the greatest. Jesus said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."

They were still not getting it. A short time later, Jesus was predicting His death for the third time, saying that the Gentiles would mock Him, spit on Him, flog Him, and kill Him. He got finished saying that and James and John asked Him, "Can we sit on your right hand and left hand in your glory?" The other disciples became angry, probably because they hadn't thought of asking Him that for themselves. Jesus finally said, "If any of you want to be great, then he must be a servant for all."

We probably shouldn't be surprised at the disciples' behavior. Pride and self-centeredness are the source of sin. Remember how Satan tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden. He said, "If you eat

that fruit you can become the most important one of all. You can be like God.” Ever since then, people sin because of their pride – thinking their choices for behavior are better than God’s choices – and because of their self-centeredness – think that their needs are more important than the needs of other people.

Before we criticize the disciples, we should look in the mirror. We are sinners. That means we are often selfish and self centered. We enjoy people serving us instead of serving them. We will serve if it is an important job and people will recognize our actions and properly thank us. But what about the lowly unimportant jobs? What about doing the hard work to serve people that don’t deserve it and serving when people won’t recognize your efforts and praise you for them? Do people joyfully do those jobs in your home? At work? At church? In your community? Or, are we too busy serving ourselves to do those things? Do we not want to do those things? Maybe those jobs are beneath us.

But what does Jesus do? He is done talking. It is time for action. So, while the disciples are arguing about importance, Jesus silently gets up and starts doing. He takes off his clothes, leaving him in a loincloth – the uniform of a servant. He takes the tools of a servant – a towel around his waist and water poured into a basin. He then does the lowly job of a servant – sitting down before each disciple, taking off his smelly sandals, and washing his filthy feet. This was a job so lowly that Hebrew servants were not required to do it, but Gentile servants were.

When Jesus comes to (meets) Peter, Peter is much too “humble” to accept Jesus washing his feet. But, at the same time, Peter is much too arrogant. He tells Jesus what to do: “You will never wash my feet.” Then Jesus says something that is very important: “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.”

In washing feet, Jesus is not doing a job because someone forgot to do it. Jesus is not just doing a good deed. Jesus is not even just giving us an example to follow. This act of foot washing is about Jesus, not us. This shows how Jesus works in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus comes to us. We don't come to Him. Because of our sin, we cannot come to Him. We don't want to come to Him. Jesus comes to us in humility as a servant. He does not come to us in glory as king. He comes to wash us. We don't and can't wash ourselves. He doesn't come to wash our dirty stinking feet. He comes to wash our dirty stinking sin-filled hearts. He would use something more precious than water to wash us. He would wash us clean from sin with His own blood.

Jesus and the disciples were sitting at table, eating the Passover which celebrated salvation for the Jews from the bondage of slavery. The next day, Jesus would win salvation for all people from the bondage of sin, death and hell. He would serve all humanity in the most humble way: by offering His life on the cross as the sacrifice for our sin. This night, we eat the new Passover meal. The Jews ate the flesh of the Passover Lamb to remember their salvation and freedom from Egypt. We eat the body and the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world; who takes away your sin; who takes away my sin. We remember, celebrate, and enjoy our salvation and freedom from death and the devil because our sins are forgiven.

Because Jesus became a servant and performed the humblest of service – far beyond washing feet – but being crucified and offering His life as a sacrifice for sin, we have been changed. Certainly we are changed for the next life. God declares us righteous by faith and heirs of eternal life. We shall live in His heavenly Kingdom and be with Jesus where He is.

But we are also changed for this life. We live in His Kingdom now and are with Jesus in His attitude and action now. Jesus said, "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you." We are to live as Jesus lived. He was humble and served in the lowliest of ways. We are to be humble and serve in the lowliest of ways.

Does this mean literally washing feet? I don't think so. We don't wear sandals and need that service now. Those people who make a big deal by ceremonially washing someone's feet in a church service may be completely contrary to Jesus' words by proudly displaying how humble they

care. Jesus is calling for a spirit of service with an attitude of humility. We are to serve any one in any way needed. No person is below us and unworthy of our service. No job is beneath our dignity. There is no place among God's people for arguing about who is most important. There is no place for showing off our service or bragging about our humility. When God provides an opportunity to serve, we serve – no matter whom the person is or what the task is.

We sit at table with the Lord tonight as the disciples sat at table with Him long on this night long ago. We come to His humble service in giving us His love and forgiveness through His Word and His comfort and assurance through the Sacrament. We leave to give that humble service to each other - at home, at school, at work, at church, and in our community – not thinking of ourselves but others; not being proud, but humble. This is Jesus' way. This is life in the Kingdom of God. The disciples didn't understand that night. Do you? Jesus said, "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." (John 13:17) Amen.