

## ***“John: Dirty Jobs”***

*Philippians 2:1-16 • John 13:1-20*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • October 29, 2023

Have you ever had to do a dirty job? Something that was just downright unpleasant? There was a television show a few years ago by Mike Rowe called *Dirty Jobs*. Mike would go and do some of these unpleasant jobs in our society with the people who do them for a living. Some of the dirtier jobs he highlighted were things like inspecting sewers, processing buffet leftovers from Las Vegas to turn it into feed for pigs, and making biodegradable flower pots from cow manure.

In our passage from John 13 this morning we find another dirty job – foot washer. Now, in our modern society maybe we’re not grossed out by that like we are some of the other dirty jobs. But think about what it was like 2,000 years ago. It was hot. Remember, this is the Middle East. There was no air conditioning. People wore sandals and they walked everywhere they went. They walked on dusty unpaved roads. Worse than just being unpaved, the roads were commonly used by animals as well as people. In the cities, there was an open trench that ran down the middle of the streets for the sewage to flow outside the wall of the city. Needless to say, feet could get pretty dirty.

Jesus is gathered with his disciples for supper. This is probably the Passover meal as it seems to take place on the night Jesus is arrested. Jesus and his disciples are seated around a table for the meal. This was a low table and they sat or reclined on cushions on the floor. If you’ve ever sat on the floor with other people to eat you know that everyone’s feet are usually not far away. So you see why it was so important for feet to be washed. But it was such a dirty job that no one wanted to do it. The host of a meal like this would usually provide a servant, really a slave, to wash the feet of the guests. Not just any servant. This was a job for the lowest servant or slave in the house. In fact, Jewish slaves could not be forced to wash feet.

John begins this passage by reminding us again of Jesus’ divinity. Verse 1 says, “Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father,” and verse 3 says, “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God.” We see once more that Jesus is God in person and that he was aware of it.

With this in mind, it’s downright shocking what Jesus does. The divine ruler of the universe gets up from the table, takes off his outer garments, wraps a towel around his waist, pours water into a basin and begins doing the dirtiest, lowest job. We can assume that most of the disciples are just speechless. Peter, however, is rarely speechless and so as usual he goes ahead and says the wrong thing. He begins with an indignant question, “Lord, do *you* wash *my* feet?” Jesus assures him that he will eventually understand. But Peter says, “No way. You shall never wash my feet.” If we give Peter the benefit of the doubt, we can assume that maybe he was embarrassed and felt it inappropriate for the teacher to do the job of a slave.

The first thing we need to realize is that if you are arguing with the Word of God, you need to step back and rethink your position. Jesus tells him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” The other thing you need to know here is that Jesus is no longer talking about foot washing at this point. He’s pointing the disciples and us to the need for Jesus to cleanse us from our sin. The washing he’s really talking about will take place when he dies on the cross. Jesus pays the penalty for our sin.

We have to ask ourselves, why would he do this? Why would he wash their feet and why would he die on the cross for us? The answer is love. I don’t mean the world’s definition of love like you see on a Hallmark movie or the Golden Bachelor. That’s not love. Jesus shows

us what love is. Verse 1 says, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” Who are Christ’s own and what does it mean that he loved them to the end?

When it says he “loved his own,” I don’t think this means just his disciples. It means all believers in all times and places. How do we become Christ’s own? The Bible says that God chose us as his. Ephesians 1 says God “chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace.” In John 15 Jesus says, “You did not choose me but I chose you.” We don’t know why God chooses us, but we know it’s not because we have ever done anything to earn it. Rick Phillips says, “Having chosen us in his gracious love, Jesus made us his own by purchase, redeeming us from our sins through the blood of his cross.” As 1 Corinthians 6 puts it, “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.” This way of looking at it focuses on the work of Christ, God the Son.

Another way to look at it is from the perspective of the Father. In John 6 Jesus says, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.” God the Father gave us to Christ as his own. The third way to understand how we become Christ’s own is to focus on the work of the Holy Spirit. We are born again as children of God through the Holy Spirit. The Bible uses the images of adoption and grafting to explain this work of the Spirit in our lives to bring us to Christ.

So what does it mean that Jesus loves his own to the end? One way to understand this is that Jesus loved his disciples all the way until the end of his life. He was certainly fully devoted to his followers. Another way to view this is that Jesus loves his followers all the way to the end of *their* lives. No matter how much we screw up in life, Jesus still loves us. As

Romans 8 says, “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Those are both true, but there’s a deeper meaning here as well. The word “end” translates the Greek word *telos* which refers to the end goal or end purpose of something. Jesus shows us that he loves us to the purpose of redeeming us. Here we see how far he will go to accomplish his purpose. He loves us to the end, which is eternity with him. As 1 John 3:16 tells us, “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”

That leads us to the final point, love is demonstrated. It involves action. “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 for you? 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. 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. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”

Jesus is not commanding us to go around literally washing each other’s feet. He’s not instituting another sacrament. He wants us to understand the bigger picture. Jesus loves us so much that he’s willing to do the dirty job for us. Washing dirty feet was symbolic. The real dirty job was giving his life on the cross for our sin, which is what makes us clean before God. Jesus says, though, that since a servant is not greater than his master, we shouldn’t consider ourselves greater than God by refusing to serve one another. Christ commands every one of us to serve him by serving one another. Each one of us should be serving somewhere in the

church. But he also wants us to serve people who are outside of the church. As Christ's church we should be the hands and feet of Jesus in our community so that when people see us serving selflessly they get an idea of what God is like.

I want to challenge each one of you to think about, in the coming weeks and months, where you can serve in the church and how together as the church we can best serve our community. The first step is to let the Serving Committee know you would like to serve somewhere. Maybe you'd be willing to serve on that committee yourself or one of the other committees like worship or discipleship or connecting. Maybe you would help us serve

our community by helping us serve young moms through the MOPS program we are putting together. Honestly, I think that is probably the most important service we can give to our community right now. Or maybe you'd be willing to help Mission 911 with the Getting Ahead classes and the Walk to Siloam. Or maybe you would like to visit some of our older members who are unable to be here in person.

Everyone can do something. Everyone who has experienced Christ's love and forgiveness can follow his example and serve others. As Kent Hughes says, let's be people of the towel. Let's serve!

*Amen.*