

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Equipped BY Jesus to Live FOR Jesus

(Studies in the Upper Room Discourse; John 13-17)

Dirty Feet

(John 13:1-17))

Study #1

Introduction: Preparation time for Jesus' followers...

When a big event looms on the horizon, we go into preparation mode well in advance of the event.

A couple will set their wedding date months before it happens because there is so much to prepare for. Athletes need the same sort of window to prepare for a big competition.

It's important to prepare if a political campaign or a big camping trip is going to be successful. (My preparations for camping excursions are legendary and silly.)

Over the next few Sunday mornings, we'll be all about preparation.

We want to be prepared for a meaningful reflection on Jesus' death on the cross (Good Friday) and on His resurrection from the dead (Easter). So, we're giving attention to an extended passage in John's gospel that shows Jesus preparing His followers for life after He is gone.

John wrote His account of the life and ministry of Jesus for a very specific purpose. He wrote to bring his readers to a saving knowledge of Jesus.

He made that point near the end of the book when he wrote this:

[John 20:30] So then, many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; [31] but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing you may have life in His Name.

So, most of the first twelve chapters of John's Gospel revolve around a small number of Jesus' miracles that show Him to be ***"the Christ, the Son of God."***

The section of Scripture we're exploring between now and Easter is different from what has come before in John.

Here, rather than inviting people to believe in Him, Jesus shifts gears. He teaches, trains, and equips His apostles who have believed and have received ***"life in His Name"*** - to now live for Him.¹

When we catch up to Jesus in John, chapter 13, He has given His final teaching to the crowds, and He has performed His last miracle.

He and His twelve apostles were together in an upstairs room in a home in Jerusalem.²

This is the last time Jesus will be with them before His death by crucifixion and He dedicates the time to equipping them to successfully follow Him after His death.³

They have come together on a Thursday evening to eat the annual Jewish Passover meal.

"Setting the Table" at the Last Supper (vv. 1-3)

¹ This section is very important to those who have not yet come to the point of believing in Jesus. By listening to Jesus, anyone who is still considering the claims and the promises of Jesus will learn more about what life in Jesus is all about, so that when they do believe in Jesus, they will be equipped to shine for Him.

² Not very creatively, we refer to John 13-17 as The Upper Room Discourse.

³ Most all the material we read in this section (John 13-17) is only recorded by John and not in the other gospels.

The Time and Place of the Last Supper

Just as an aside, Jesus and His disciples ate this meal a day *before* most others in Jerusalem observed the Passover.

Due to a difference in the calendars kept by Judeans and Galileans (which Jesus and the disciples were), the major observance of Passover in Jerusalem on that year would be on Friday, while Galileans would have observed it on Thursday, as we see here in John 13.⁴

Let's immerse ourselves in the mind of Jesus on this Thursday night, this night before His death.

Jesus - Aware of What was About to Happen (v. 1)

John tells us, and we aren't surprised to read, that Jesus knew exactly what was going to happen to Him.

[1]...Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart from this world to the Father...

For His whole life, He had been aiming at this "**hour**." It's time. He's shortly going to return to the Father He had left in glory when He came to fulfill His mission on earth.

Skip down a little bit and we read that Jesus was consciously aware of three truths that steeled Him for what was coming.

[3] Jesus, knowing that the Father had handed all things over to Him, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God...

He knows His own limitless resources, given to Him by the Father. He knows where He came from. He knows where He is going. His Father has thoroughly equipped him to fulfill His life's purpose.

And with all of that going on, as He faced the coming brutal trials, scourging, mocking, and death, He was still not preoccupied with Himself. No, the welfare of His disciples was foremost in His mind.

Jesus Loved His Disciples (v. 1)

[1]... having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

He loved them "**to the end**" - to the end of His life? Are we to understand by this that Jesus never stopped loving them? Or that He loved them right up until the end?

That is certainly true. But I don't think that is John's point.

The real significance of the words "**to the end**" centers on the degree to which He loved these twelve disciples. He loved them to the uttermost.

Nobody loved them the way Jesus did. His love for His followers was the purest, the most sacrificial love they had ever known.

He'll confirm that love on the next day - the day we call "Good Friday" - by the lengths to which He was willing to go to for them.

That, by the way, is the love of God we receive when we believe and are adopted into His family as God's son or daughter.

Today, His love, in a world of earthquakes and wars and inflation and cancer and divorce and heartache, social upheaval and political turmoil, is the solid foundation upon which we can build lives that have meaning and purpose.

And He will never pull the rug out from under us and take away that love.

John focuses on Jesus, here, of course. But he highlights another character at the beginning: Judas Iscariot.

By the time the crew had climbed up the stairs for this Passover meal, Judas had already decided to carry out his plan to betray Jesus.

⁴ From Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ by Harold Hoehner. The following day, all Israel observed Passover and sacrificed the Passover lamb in the middle of the afternoon, precisely the time at which Jesus, the Lamb of God, died.

Judas' Course is Set (v. 2)

[2] During supper,⁵ the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him...

It is not unusual to see someone painting a picture of Judas as a deluded political radical who was just trying to advance Jesus' cause by his actions.

I think the best understanding of what Judas had planned to do and what he actually did was to ruthlessly, with premeditation, hand Jesus over to the ruling Jews who would, predictably, do to Jesus exactly what they actually did to Him.

After all, John has just told us (John, chapter 12) that it was Judas' greed that opened the door for Satan to plant the idea of betrayal in his mind.

The Bible portrays Judas as completely culpable for his actions. The devil put a diabolical idea into a very receptive mind.

Aside from the focus on Judas, though, the main event at the beginning of the meal is the outrageous action Jesus took of washing His disciples' feet.

The Confusion Brought About by Foot-Washing (vv. 3-8a)

Feet Washed by the Ultimate Servant (vv. 3-5)

In San Antonio, in 2024, we don't consider foot-washing a necessary courtesy provided by every host to his or her guests.

But, in 2024 San Antonio, we usually wear closed-toed shoes, our streets are paved, and we have designated garbage dumps.

In the ancient world, foot-washing was a necessary service offered by the host to anyone who came to his home.

A servant (usually the servant lowest on the totem pole) was given the onerous assignment of washing the feet of guests. No guest would be assigned or expected to wash his or her own feet.

Foot-washing was necessary because of the condition of the city streets of a typical ancient near eastern city.

All of us can imagine what feet would look like (and smell like) after a long day of trudging through muddy streets while wearing sandals.

Along with mud, garbage was often dumped into the streets, where dogs roamed, eating the garbage, and then leaving an even bigger mess. (Exhibit A: My dog-inhabited backyard after a rain...)

Mud and grime and more were caked on to the sandals and feet of the thirteen men who came together to eat the Passover Meal in Jerusalem.

As they entered this home, I'm sure that the Twelve had expected the common courtesy of having their feet washed.

But they weren't greeted by a servant at the door. Their feet were not washed.

And not wanting to stoop to wash their own feet, they all proceeded to the Upper Room to eat the Passover - dirty feet and all.

At some point during the Passover Meal itself, Jesus did the unthinkable.

[3] Jesus...[4] got up from supper, and laid His outer garments aside, and He took a towel and tied it around Himself. [5] Then He poured water into the basin, and began washing the disciples' feet and wiping them with the towel which He had tied around Himself.

⁵ This Gospel is the only one that does not show Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper at this meal.

He untied the sandal thongs⁶ of His disciples and started washing their sweaty, smelly, grimy, filthy feet.

Today, most of us would have a hard time letting anyone wash our feet. Can you imagine letting the Lord Jesus wash your feet?

We'd be embarrassed, shocked, self-conscious. We might have done what Peter did.

Jesus was making the rounds, going from disciple to disciple. We don't know how many sets of feet He had washed before He came to a very confused Simon Peter.

Peter's Confusion (vv. 6-8a)

[6] So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?"

Peter knew that if he was the Lord and Master, he sure wouldn't be washing feet.

Foot-washing was to be done at the door, before dinner, by the lowliest of servants. Here it was being done at the table, during dinner, by Jesus – their Leader!

Jesus understood Peter's confusion.

[7] Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing, you do not realize right now, but you will understand later."

Now that answer might have satisfied some people. It didn't satisfy Peter. He wasn't about to sit still while His Lord performed such a degrading act.

Peter's Excitement (v. 8)

[8a] Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!"

⁶ Remember John 1:27, where John the Baptist declared that he was unworthy to loosen Jesus' sandal strap.

That's as emphatic as the Greek language gets. You can hear the emotion in Peter's words.

And I understand where Peter's coming from. I wouldn't have liked it if Jesus had washed my feet, either.

And if I didn't say it out loud, I would have been thinking the same thing. *"Lord, it isn't Your place to do this!"* I'll bet that's what all the disciples were thinking.

But there was purpose to Jesus' action here. There always is. And it was necessary that He wash Peter's feet.

We watch as Jesus takes this simple act of foot-washing and crafts out of it two crucial life lessons for Peter - and for all of us who come after him.

The Clarity Brought About by Foot-Washing (vv. 8b-17)

Jesus' Foot-Washing, and Our Connection to Him (vv. 8b-10)

[8b] Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no place with Me."

So, we notice that ***"washing"*** pictures something foundational to a relationship with Jesus. No washing. No relationship.

Then, swinging wildly from extreme to extreme, Simon Peter made a typical "Peter the Pendulum" remark.

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

Why settle for a partial cleansing? Might not a more thorough washing guarantee more connection to Jesus?

To be honest, here is where I feel sorry for Peter because everything he says gets corrected. Jesus pulled Peter back to the center.

[10] Jesus said to him, “He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet; otherwise he is completely clean. And you are clean - but not all of you.”

Jesus says that not all twelve of the apostles had been given a bath. Specifically, Judas wasn't clean. Judas wasn't saved.

[11] For He knew the one who was betraying Him; it was for this reason that He said, “Not all of you are clean.”

But, beyond the condition of Judas Iscariot, Jesus knew exactly what He was doing when He washed His disciples' feet.

Foot-washing gave a beautiful picture of what it looked like for a “washed” believer in Jesus to sustain a close, on-going fellowship with Him.

Jesus was using the language of bathing and foot-washing to teach a vital lesson about cleansing from sin.

To have **“bathed”** is to be washed clean of personal sin. It is to be forgiven. God gives cleansing and forgiveness to the one who believes in Jesus.⁷

Believers in Jesus are clean, not because of anything they have done, but because of what Jesus did on the cross. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. As Jesus Himself said from the cross with respect to forgiveness, **[John 19:30] “It is finished!”**

But, as it is in the natural world, so it is in our walk with Jesus.

One bath per lifetime doesn't cut it. We must bathe or shower or rinse off regularly, because we're going to get dirty out there.

When I lose my footing, slip, and fall into sin, I need Jesus to wash me, spiritually speaking. The process that leads to Jesus' cleansing from dirty feet begins with confession.

This - confession - has been a big part of my story over the past couple of weeks. Thanks to a passing comment from a good friend, some eye-opening words from a book I'm reading, and some reflection before God, I've gotten a fresh view of one of my character flaws.

This one's been with me for a long time. I've confessed it to the Lord lots of times. He's cleansed me lots of times.

There has been growth, but it's still present. I would call it a chronic weakness. It's a part of my style of relating with others that blocks the flow of Jesus' power and love.⁸

So, I've recently confessed, again. And He's washed my feet, again. I'm clean, again. I am, again, walking with renewed confidence into growth and taking steps away from this weakness. That's a part of my current next-step story.

How about you?

Are there areas of your life that cry out for a fresh cleansing from God? Have your feet gotten dirty? If so, you'll find the cleansing you need when you go to Jesus and confess.

There's more about my own sin that I'm aware of that I didn't mention just now. But I have been extremely specific in confession to the Lord. And I've been extremely specific with a couple of people.

So, when talking about confession, we're not talking about a general, vague, nebulous, *“Lord, I know I've been bad this week”* - but a pointed admission of wrongdoing:

“I spoke to my wife (or husband) in a mean way.”

“I cheated on a test today.”

“I went to a pornographic web site yesterday.”

“I drank alcohol past the point of control last week.”

You get the picture. Specifics count in confession.

And what does Jesus do when we confess?

⁷ Notice that the Lord was saying that not all the twelve disciples had taken a bath. Specifically, Judas wasn't clean. He wasn't saved.

⁸ Paul might say this personality trait **“quenches”** or **“grieves”** the Holy Spirit.

He rises from His throne, wraps Himself with a servant's towel, and then washes the filth off our feet so that we can walk again in the confidence that we are clean again!

This week, all of us who have been forgiven are going to get dirty feet. Count on it. But Jesus has provided a way to get clean: confession. Put that good gift to good use and experience the cleansing power of Jesus when you sin.

After this explanation of foot-washing, Jesus went on to wash Peter's feet, and all the other apostolic feet. Then, He went back to His place at the low couch, reclining with the Twelve.

I can only imagine that everybody's breathing a sigh of relief, just glad that the whole embarrassing foot-washing episode was over.

But it wasn't over. Once seated, Jesus brought up the foot-washing all over again to teach something else.

Now He used that foot-washing event to explain something about how the community that would form in His Name was to act toward each other.

Jesus' Foot-Washing and Our Connection to Each Other (vv. 12-17)

Jesus stopped for a de-briefing (v. 12)

[12] Then, 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?"

This time, nobody said a word. The disciples had all watched as Jesus corrected Simon Peter every time he opened his mouth.

Now, they were all thinking, *"Well, it would seem that You washed our feet, Jesus. But why don't You go ahead and tell us what You just did."*

In the absence of a response, Jesus explained what is involved in following Him, the consummate Servant.

What does it mean to follow a Servant? (vv. 13-16)

[13] "You call Me 'Teacher' and 'Lord'; and you are correct, for so I am. [14] So if I, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."⁹

There was never any question about who the Leader of the group was. Jesus was the Leader. And, for three years He set an example in all kinds of settings.

When He wanted to build some new character trait into His followers, He first modeled it.

He modeled courage by clearing out the buyers and sellers from the temple in Jerusalem. He modeled prayer by spending whole nights in prayer to His Father. He modeled faith by trusting His Father for His own daily needs.

Jesus also wanted His followers to embrace servanthood. So, He preached a really good sermon about the importance of serving and wrote a book about serving.

No. He modeled servanthood.

He took off the festive garments that people always wore at Passover, clothed Himself as a common servant, filled a basin with water, and performed the menial service of washing His disciples' feet.

And the message arising from this action was so clear that it hardly needs saying. But He said it. So, we're listening.

[15] "For I gave you an example, so that you also would do just as I did for you. [16] Truly, truly I say to you, a slave is not

⁹ No New Testament text requires foot-washing of believers, not even 1 Timothy 5:10, as Paul there is using foot-washing as a figure of speech to refer to serving, generally.

greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him."

Servanthood is not advanced discipleship. It is elementary discipleship. It isn't optional to following Jesus, it is essential.

And Jesus' conclusion to this first act in the Upper Room puts an exclamation mark to all He's been saying.

Knowing is nothing; DOING is what it's all about! (v. 17)

[17] "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

- I get no credit for memorizing John 13 - unless I serve.
- Understanding first century foot-washing protocols is pointless - unless I serve.
- The ability to exegete every word from this passage counts for nothing - unless I serve.

Jesus calls us to follow Him into servanthood in every arena of our lives.

What would it look like if, this afternoon, you adopted a servant's mentality at home? What would your wife / your husband / your kids / your parents / your siblings / your roommate - say if you gave yourself to serving them in Jesus' Name?

What if, tomorrow, you took a servant's mentality with you to work or to school? What difference would it make in the way you related to your teachers, classmates, people you work with if you accepted the role of a servant?

And, of course, Jesus would want all of us adopt a servant's mentality here, at church. That service need not be grandiose.

It can be behind the scenes, inconspicuous, and low-key. In fact, I'd urge that we all think small. For instance...

- If you are a regular attender here, if you don't have small children, don't have to carry a bunch of stuff into the building, and are

in good health, try parking as far away from the front door as possible on Sunday morning so that others who need better access might have the close spots.

- If you see someone who appears new here, greet that person warmly. Direct them to where they need to go.
- If you see someone who seems sad or upset, take the time to pray for them. Pray with them. Listen to them.
- If you find out that someone is in need, take inventory of what you have that might help them out.

For the most part, we don't need special training for foot-washing service. It's much more a matter of mindset. All we really need to do is keep our eyes open to see needs and our hearts open to opportunities. Then, get out the basin and towel - and serve!

Conclusion:

It is significant that of all the elements of following He could have chosen to address first, Jesus spoke about - and illustrated! - the need for repeated cleansing from sin and servanthood.

With respect to cleansing from sin, the truth is that we all, from time to time will suffer from dirty feet syndrome.

I'm not being pessimistic or fatalistic. I'm being realistic.

Try as we might, every last one of us is going to mess up occasionally. We are going to sin.

And when we sin, we are to go to Jesus, and confess our sin. Then, He, our Servant Savior, will get out the basin and towel and do for us what He did for those disciples in the upstairs room.

He'll clean us up and we'll experience the cleansing He offers. He will cleanse our consciences when we confess our sins.¹⁰

¹⁰ See Hebrews 10:2.

It is important for us all to recognize that the people around us may well have a need for the service that you can provide. Their feet are dirty, and you will “wash their feet” as you serve them in Jesus’ Name.

It is tempting to live to be served. But Jesus calls us in another direction.

His vision is that we would adopt His mindset, which was not to be served, but to serve. That we would grow into joyful, willing, even menial service.

Jesus was not above washing feet. Neither are we.