

Gospel Community as Witness
A Serving Community
John 13

Welcome to Grace Community Church! We are so glad that you are here. If this is the first time for you here at Grace, or for you and your family, or if you are a student here for the first time, you picked a good day to be here – pot luck Sunday. Even if you were not anticipating a pot luck, we would love for you to stay and eat the delicious food that has been prepared for all of us and to meet some of the ones who have been here for many years or to interact with someone who, like you, is here for the first time. We would love for you to join us after the service for a meal.

If this is your first week here, you should know that we are in the second week of a five-week series titled *Gospel Community as Witness*. It is somewhat of a conclusion to a year-long series on evangelism and is mostly taken from the account from John’s Gospel of Jesus’ interaction and teaching on the night before he was crucified. We will be in John 13, today, and although our primary focus will be on the first half of the chapter, most people know John 13:35, where Jesus told his disciples, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” If there were a theme verse for this mini-series, John 13:35 would be that verse.

Jesus pointed out that a community in which people love one another is attractive to those who are on the outside of the community and, so, he encouraged his disciples to be that community. Followers of Jesus have every reason to live in such a way that not only pleases the Lord, but also is attractive to those who do not know Jesus. Living in a loving and serving community is, of itself, a witness to the world in which Jesus is exalted.

Before we jump in, I want to say just a few things about lists, or, about points that you may hear/see in a sermon. First:

- 1. Lists can help organize thoughts, plus bring focus to truth and its implications**

Hey, God has lists, of sorts – the Ten Commandments, which constitute a summary of all 613 laws. There are eight beatitudes, twelve tribes of Israel, twelve apostles, and – you get the idea. Lists can be a good thing, but, you should also be aware that:

- 2. Lists can be quite distracting, allowing one to be content to wade in the shallows**

As helpful as lists can be, they can lull you into being content with an over-focus on application and keep you from deeper level thinking about God's truth, so make sure that does not happen. And, third...

- 3. There will be a lot of lists, today**

This may well be the most lists I have ever given in a message. It may be helpful for you to write them down and think about them later, but know that this is more lists than usual as we think about the gospel witness of a serving community.

This morning, we are going to think about the time that Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, recorded in John 13. As is so often the case, it is easy to miss the impact of a truth in Scripture when we are unfamiliar with first-century culture. I am not sure we can comprehend the shock that the disciples experienced when Jesus began to wash their feet. It is not as though Jesus got up and washed the dishes. What Jesus did was an act of humility far greater than if the President of the United States came to your house

for dinner and washed dishes after the meal and then moved to clean your bathrooms.

As you can imagine, the dusty roads did a number on sandal-clad feet. Washing the feet of guests was an act that was standard when friends entered a home in the first century. It was, however, a task reserved for the lowest of slaves. Many Jews would not expect a Jewish slave to wash their feet – that task was reserved for Gentile slaves. Obviously, on the occasion of the Last Supper, no one had washed Jesus’ feet, nor any of the disciples’ feet. Before you judge the disciples too harshly, make sure you understand just how socially humiliating this task was. It may have been acceptable for one of the disciples to wash Jesus’ feet, but it was absolutely unthinkable that Jesus – their leader, their rabbi – would wash their feet. Our Scripture, this morning, is John 13:1-17. Please stand for the reading of the Word. I will be reading from the ESV.

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. 2 During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, 3 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, 4 rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. 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.”

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.

Please be seated and close your eyes for a moment. Can you sense the confusion in the room as Jesus removes his robe and puts a towel around His waist? This was an act that Jews would have considered despicable. Can you hear, or even feel, the silence as He pours the water into a basin and prepares to wash the disciples' feet? Are you as bewildered as the disciples as He comes to your feet, doing that which is reserved for the lowest of slaves? **PRAYER**

You would be surprised at how many ideas there are about when, exactly, Jesus' act of service, occurred. Most conservative scholars would agree that Jesus washed his disciples' feet during, or, just after, the Passover Meal on the Thursday night before he was crucified. I agree. Luke 22:24 tells us that during the meal the disciples had argued about who would be the greatest in the Kingdom. Unfortunate timing for such a discussion! Jesus gave them a lesson they would never forget. Jesus' example extended far beyond this small group of men, and, in fact, it extends all the way down through the ages to us today. Before we look carefully at this text, I want to share three general observations about being a servant.

Full disclosure – these three points and the main points of the message came from Bob Anderson, founder of both TVR in the NC mountains and Trail’s End Ranch in Southeastern Montana, which is why there are so many points. Camp ministry *requires* servant hearts, but no matter where you are, it is a challenge to serve as Jesus did. Three quick thoughts about servants before we draw more thoughts from the text:

- **A servant is one who sees the needs around him/her**

Are you aware of others’ needs, or are you the kind who says, “Hey, if you need something, just let me know!”? Jesus saw the dirty feet and knew something needed to be done. Second:

- **A servant moves to meet needs without being told**

I would guess that it never entered the disciples’ minds to wash feet. They were too busy thinking about ruling in the Kingdom. Jesus moved to meet the need. A servant does so without being told. Last:

- **A servant looks only to the master for approval**

If one of the disciples had moved to wash the others’ feet, would the rest of the disciples have approved or disapproved? Would Jesus have approved or disapproved? What else matters? I can promise you, if you are a true servant, others will think you are crazy! Will Jesus approve of your actions? What else matters? Let’s look at the text to see what is required of one who wishes to be called a servant in the third of four lists today. First:

- 1. A servant makes proper use of limited time**

Jesus had a great deal to teach the disciples that night. What would you have done in His place – would you have taught more, or served in some way? Which do you think the disciples remembered more easily, His teachings that are found in John 13-16, or Jesus washing their feet? It is never a waste of time to serve someone. Look at verse 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.”

What do you want to accomplish in the years God will give you on this earth? How many years do you think you have left? You may think you have your whole life stretched out in front of you, but, in reality, none of us has much time! Life is short, much shorter than we think. If we want to make the best use of our time, we had best be serving others. The second requirement of a servant is that:

2. Service must be based on love

Well, service that matters to God, anyway. Jesus’ love for His disciples was evident throughout His ministry, but never more than on this night. Verse 1 says that Jesus showed them the full extent of His love, or, literally, the end of His love. There are lots of different ways we could express our love for someone. We could give a gift, sacrifice a possession, or spend time with him or her. Most of our offerings, though, would point to our generosity rather than to our humility.

We may give food or money to the homeless or offer rides to those in need, but I wonder how many of us would act in a manner in our culture equal to Jesus removing His robe, being dressed in a way that was contemptible to both Jews and Gentiles alike, and washing the feet of His followers? Would we serve as Jesus did, when the very thought of such service would bring gasps of horror from those

who know us well? Only true love will compel us to such service. We cannot serve everyone, so ask God for discernment and for a loving heart that will follow His lead. A third characteristic of a servant is:

3. A servant is sure of His standing with God

If we are secure in our relationship with God, we will be free to serve others. If, on the other hand, we indulge our insecurities, we will become people of the petty rather than people of the towel. Our feelings will get hurt, we will focus primarily on ourselves, we will think about how our rights are being violated, and the only people we will serve will be ourselves. Verse 3: “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, rose from supper.”

Most of us want to be affirmed by others. In fact, the Lord recognizes our need for affirmation and commands others to encourage and affirm us. When He speaks directly to us, though, He tells us that He is all we need. We crave feedback and we long for others to affirm our service, and thus, affirm our value. The only One we have to please, though, is in heaven. Let’s make sure we are OK with Jesus, and then move to serve. The fourth thing about being a servant is:

4. We are even called to serve our enemies

How many pairs of feet did Jesus wash? 12. Who does that mean was still there? Judas. It may be that the Lord has called you to wash the feet of someone who has mistreated you badly, even someone who has betrayed you. I know you feel you may not be ready for that, but somewhere along the line, you may be called to serve that person. Why should we be willing to perform such a difficult task? Because of our next point:

5. Service is a direct command of the Lord

Most of us live our lives the way we think is best, and for many of us, that does not leave much time for serving others. As believers, however, we are not given the option of whether we will serve or not and since our time is limited, we are called to serve those in our own church community. Verses 14-15: “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.” If we refuse to serve our fellow believers, we are elevating our own importance above that of our Lord. If the Creator of the universe, the Keeper of the stars, stooped to wash the feet of common men, who are we to scorn the towel? If, on the other hand, we are willing to follow our Lord’s example, we will find the last point to be true:

6. Selfless service *is* the path of happiness

Verse 17 says, “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” Why is it that we associate success and wealth with happiness? Oh, it makes sense early in life to think that if you achieve your goals, especially financial goals, then you will be able to really enjoy life. *That* is what will make you happy. But, if you have made it to your 30’s, you know deep down inside that you are going to need more than worldly success to make you truly happy. It is often surprising to discover who is really happy in this world.

One thing we can say for sure from John 13 is that the people who take up the towel in love are blessed and happy. Just because you serve doesn’t make you happy, but if you serve as unto the Lord, you will be! But, do we really believe that? If we do, then why do we spend so much time serving ourselves instead of others?

In His act of humility and service, Jesus set an example for us, and, indeed, instructed us to serve one another in similar ways. As we serve one another, we serve Jesus, according to a principle we take from Matthew 25:40: “Truly, I say to you, whatever you did (i.e. feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit those in prison) for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.”

So, whose feet have you washed, lately? Not literally, but who have you served when humility was required of you? Maybe it would be better to ask whose feet have I not washed lately? Do you see how the principle of servanthood in this text applies to so much more than doing something difficult for someone? For instance, who have you criticized this week? “Well, I wouldn’t do it that way!” With whom have you been impatient? How many idiots have you identified on the highways this week? How might you have served someone when, instead, you thought, “Oh, I’ll just let someone else do it,”?

Serving well in a community takes both humility and gratitude. We must practice both, in fact. Does that seem strange to you? Practice humility and gratitude? Yes we must. Think about it! I want to close by giving one last list, and while this goes for every one of us, I especially want to direct my thoughts to incoming freshmen who are looking for a church. Let me commend you, by the way, for looking for a church. Here are a few important things to consider as you look. First:

- 1. Seek a church community that believes that God has faithfully revealed himself through his word and through his Son**

Would you marry someone who told you the truth some of the time and made up things to make points to you the rest of the time? I didn’t think so. If we have any hope of knowing God, he must reveal himself to us. When we try to understand God based own

our reasoning abilities, impressive though they may be, we inevitably end up creating a god in our own image. If this book is unreliable, we are wasting our time. Second:

2. Seek a community that exalts the crucified and risen Jesus

Did Jesus set an example for us to follow? Absolutely! We read those words from him this morning. But, Jesus did not come simply to be an example of how moral people should live. There are no good people, in fact, apart from God's goodness in our lives, and we are only made right with God when we repent of our sins and believe that Jesus came to live a perfect life and die as an eligible – and, in fact – a perfect sacrifice for our sins. Three days after he was crucified, Jesus rose from the dead. Find a church community that openly professes Jesus and that does not limit itself to speak of God in a generic sort of way. Third:

3. Seek a gospel-centered community

Find a community that understands that the only goodness that its members have is in Christ alone. Make sure that they desire to live as a gospel community and that they are serious about sharing the gospel with a world that desperately needs to hear it. In other words, find a church where people are not ashamed to be associated with the cross of Jesus. Last:

4. Join a community in which you will take the initiative to know and serve the others of the community

If you are a student who is a believer, chances are that you desire to be involved in a local church as well as an on-campus ministry. If so, either you are trying to find a church where you can blend in, worship with your friends, hear a sermon and go home – or, you are looking for a community in which to serve. May I suggest the latter

approach? If your walk with Jesus is the most important thing in your life, and if the way God has designed for you to serve the body of Christ is in a local church, go in seeking to serve. “Well, I don’t know anyone.” I am going to guess if you are committed to serving the community, the community is going to recognize you very quickly and make you feel right at home! And, what if they don’t? When you are serving others from the heart, Jesus is shining through you. So, as we close today, let us all pray that the Lord will make us people of the towel – the towel Jesus’ used to wash the feet of his disciples. Let’s pray.