

A Family Growing in Christ, Serves

- I. Because we've seen how Jesus served others.
- II. Because we know how Jesus served us.

*13 It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*

*2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*

*6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"*

*7 Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."*

*8 "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."*

*Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."*

*9 "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"*

*10 Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.*

*12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. 13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.*

Over the past few weeks in our worship series, we've been reflecting on who we are as a Christian congregation and how that plays out in our everyday lives. For example, 3 weeks ago, we celebrated the fact that it is God who brought us into this family of believers by first bringing us into his family through faith in Jesus. By connecting us to himself through his Word and Sacrament, he also connected us to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. He has made us into a Family Growing in Christ. But what does such a family do? How do we express our identity as a Family Growing in Christ? Well, one way is, we worship. That is, we come together to offer our prayers and praises to God, to feed our faith on his Word and Sacrament, and encourage one another by our very presence together as a body of believers. That was Pastor Priewe's message two weeks ago.

And then last week, we moved on to what we might call the second active trait of a family growing in Christ, namely, we study. In other words, we spend time in God's word, the inspired and inherit Scriptures, growing in our understanding of God's truth and applying that

truth to our lives and the lives of our children, whether it's through personal devotions, or in a large group Bible study, or through our participation in something like a Life Group. All are expressions of our desire to be students of the Word. A family growing in Christ, studies.

Well, today, we want to focus on the third active trait of a Christian body of believers, namely, we serve. In fact, that's our theme today, namely, A Family Growing in Christ Serves. The question that we need to answer today is, "Why?" What reason would anyone, in effect, volunteer to be a servant to someone else? Why would anyone choose to carry out a task that someone else could have done, or maybe should have done, for themselves? I mean, don't we all have more than enough to do without having to serve the needs of other people, too? Why would anyone say that one of the active traits of a family growing in Christ is that we serve one another? Why is that? 2 Reasons. I. Because we've seen how Jesus served others. II. Because we know how Jesus served us.

Our text for today records an event that took place when Jesus was celebrating the Passover meal with his disciples for the last time. Later that same night, the night which we call Maundy Thursday, Jesus would institute the sacrament of holy communion are celebrating the Lord's supper with his disciples. But before he does that, Jesus has a little object lesson for his disciples. You maybe know that in Bible times, it was customary for a host to provide a basin of water for his guests to wash the dirt off their sandaled feet after a long walk on the dusty roads of Palestine. Traditionally this foot-washing was performed by a household slave, the person on the bottom rung of the org chart. But because Jesus had specifically instructed Peter and John to prepare this upper room so that Jesus could eat the Passover meal alone with his disciples, there were no servants present to wash anybody's feet. And that was the problem.

Do you think there was a little awkwardness in that room as every disciple looked around thinking, "Hmmm. I wonder who's going to do it? It ain't my job. I'm no slave. I'm not going to stoop down and wash anyone else's feet. Besides you couldn't pay me enough to touch that guy's feet." So what happened? They all sat down for a meal with their own dirty feet. No matter how uncomfortable they would have been, there was not a single disciple who was willing to say, "I'll be the servant here."

But what the disciples refuse to do, incredibly, the Master of the meal volunteered to do for them. John records the event with these words. *The evening meal was in progress* (In other words, the meal had already started.) *and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus*. That's a reminder that Jesus was about to serve someone who plotting against him. John goes on to tell us, *Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God*. With those words, John is underscoring who Jesus is. Jesus is the eternal Son of God. He had all the power and authority in the world. And he knows it. And yet from that position of power and authority what does Jesus do? He chooses to set it aside so he can get down on his hands and knees. John tells us that Jesus got up from the meal, took off his outer garment, maybe stripped down to his waist like a slave would do, put a towel around his waist, and starting washing his disciples' feet, one filthy toe at a time.

Can you imagine the emotions that those disciples must have been experiencing? Shock, like, "Jesus, what are you doing?" Maybe embarrassment, that Jesus had to be the one to perform this menial slave's labor. Or guilt, that not one of them had volunteered to do it first. You know that's what they were feeling, because when Jesus starts washing Peter's feet, Peter, who was never at a loss for words, comes right out and says, "*Lord, are you going to wash my feet?*" In other words, "Jesus, this isn't right. This is backwards. You are the Lord. You're my master. You

shouldn't be washing my feet. I should be washing your feet.”

Jesus response to Peter? “(Peter), *you do not realize what I am doing, but later you will understand*. While that turned out to be true, it didn't satisfy Peter at the time. Instead Peter stubbornly insists, “*No, you shall never wash my feet.*” Now, just for a minute, I want you to think about this. Why did Peter refuse to let Jesus wash his feet? Was it because Peter had some fungal issues that were too embarrassing to let anyone see? Was it because Peter's toes were so ticklish to the touch? Was it because Peter didn't let anybody touch his feet? I don't know, maybe all those things were true, but I don't think that's why Peter said what he said. No, I think Peter refused to let Jesus wash his feet because he thought that washing feet, something a slave would typically do, was just not fitting for someone who Peter confessed to be “*the Christ, the son of the Living God.*”

In fact, do you know what Peter's reaction reminds me of? It reminds me of what Peter said to Jesus earlier in his ministry. When Jesus said that he would have to suffer and die at the hands of his enemies, what did Peter say? “*Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!*” (Matthew 16:22). In both cases, Peter was balking at the idea of Jesus doing something, or having something done to him, that just wasn't fitting for a man of Jesus' position. For Peter, that just wasn't right.

Tell me, at that moment in time, what was Peter missing? What critical truth did Peter failed to grasp? Peter had lost sight of what Jesus had told his disciples in Matthew 20:28, “*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” With those words, Jesus is defining his mission in life. Even though Jesus is the Lord of the universe who deserves to be served by all creation, Jesus tells us that he was born into this world as a little child, not so that he could be served, but rather so that he could be the server. So that he could be the servant. How does St. Paul put it in Philippians 2? [Jesus] *made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!* (Philippians 2:7-8). Ultimately, that was Jesus greatest act of service, wasn't it? Surrendering his perfect life on a cross for a world full of sinners. We talk about a soldier jumping on a grenade to save his fellow soldiers as the ultimate act of service. Well, multiply that sacrifice by all the people in the world and you have the service that Jesus rendered all mankind.

But now, you realize, Jesus not only served people through his death. He also served people throughout his life. And I don't just mean the miracles he performed by raising the dead, healing the sick and feeding the thousands. I'm talking about something much more mundane, something menial. I'm talking about washing feet!

Tell me, is there a lesson here for us in Jesus' action in the Upper Room? Yes, there is. And Jesus wants to make sure that his disciples then and now don't miss it. So what does Jesus say? “*Do you understand what I've done for you? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.*” (John 13:12-15)

So what is Jesus saying there? Is he saying that if we're really Christians, we'll all be pulling off one another's shoes and socks and scrubbing toes? That's how some churches would take these verses. We need to physically wash each other's feet. But that's not what Jesus says here. Notice Jesus doesn't say “*you should do what I have done for you*. Jesus says “*You should do as I have done for you.*” In other words, this was an example of how a person could serve the needs of others. It's an example of seeing a need and filling it. It's an example of stooping down

and doing something that nobody else wanted to do, even if they could have, or should have done it themselves. It's an example of saying, "I'll be the servant."

Now, as you think about your life, what does that look like? what does that look like end your life and mine? Well, that depends. In your house, what's the one thing no one wants to do? Clean the toilet, pick up after the kids, turn off the TV or set down the phone so you can listen to what your loved one is saying? Who's going to be the first to put on a towel and start washing feet? Or how about at work, or school or in the community? What needs to be done? How can you be a servant leader?

Or how about here at Mount Olive? Have you ever seen people washing feet here at church? Actually, I have. I saw it a few days ago over in the commons. I saw a whole group of ladies washing feet. Oh to the untrained eye, it might have looked like they were serving a funeral dinner. But no, they were washing feet. And before that it was the people gathered around a table outside the office. It might have looked like they were collating the service bulletins, but they weren't, they were washing feet. And before that it was the guys out in the atrium assembling the conference room chairs. I am sure that they didn't think they were washing feet, but they were. And same thing is true of the person who put the wine and wafers in the pews today, the person who handed you a bulletin when you walked in, the person who's running the worship slides up in the balcony. All of them are washing your feet.

And why are they doing that? Why are they doing what servants do? Two reasons. First, because they saw Jesus do it first. Throughout his life, Jesus saw that people had physical needs. He knew that something had to be done. And so, in love, Jesus did it. Jesus volunteered to meet their needs. And now, God's people are following Jesus' example.

But there's a more important reason that your brothers and sisters in Christ here are eager to wash your feet. It's because they know what Jesus has done for them. They know that Jesus has done more than wash their feet. He's washed their souls. He's cleansed all of us of the filth of our sins, the sins of pride and arrogance, the sins of laziness and neglect, the sins of wanting other people to serve us, rather than us being willing to serve them. You realize, that with his blood and righteousness, Jesus forgiven you and me of all those sins. He's made us new again. He's given us heart that is now eager to put his love in action in our lives. He's made us a family of men, women and children who are looking for opportunities to use the time and talents that he's entrusted to us to meet the needs of others in our congregation, our community and our world, no matter how big or how menial those tasks are. My friends, that is why this Family Growing in Christ Serves. We serve because He first served us. Amen.