

EXTREME HUMILITY

The Reverend David O. Guss, Pr.

Bethlehem Lutheran Church St. Mark's Lutheran Church St. Timothy Lutheran Church
Hallandale, FL Coral Gables, FL Miami Gardens, FL

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Scripture: John 13:1-15

AND, MAY THE PEACE OF GOD WHICH PASSES ALL HUMAN UNDERSTANDING, KEEP
YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS THROUGH CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD, AMEN.

I want to begin with a serious question: How accurate would you be if someone asked you to evaluate yourself? For example, if you were asked to describe your athletic ability, your appearance, or your intellect - how would you rate yourself? Now, naturally you and I would never be guilty of such misguided estimations of our own abilities, would we? Did you know that national surveys show that most of us claim to feel 9 years younger than we actually are, and we also claim that we look 5 years younger than other people our age? Well, a little bit of pride is not necessarily a bad thing. It certainly does a person no good to be down on themselves, to think themselves of no value, worthless, incapable. Still, history is filled with tales of people whose ego or pride was their undoing.

And, that brings us to our scripture for this evening. It was time for the Passover celebration and Jesus had a problem with his disciples. Not long before this celebration he had explained to them that he must suffer and die. You would have thought that this would have caused quite a stir among the disciples. The Lord was saying he was going to be crucified. Doubtless they were bothered by his statements, but it appears his words didn't really penetrate into their thick skulls. In fact, Luke tells us that at the Lord's Supper, just after Jesus announced that one of them would betray him, the disciples got into a dispute about which of them was the greatest (Luke 22:24). Can you imagine that? They were so self-involved that when Jesus announced he was going to be betrayed and then executed, they went on with their petty schemes of worming their way to the top of the ecclesiastical pyramid. Maybe that quarrel was the reason this story of humility appears in our lesson from John's Gospel this evening. Let's read the 1st verse together: John writes, *"Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."* What a beautiful statement about Christ's devotion to these 12 sometimes troublesome men. *"He loved them to the end."*

Then, John writes, -let's continue reading verses 2 thru 9: *"²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And, during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, ^[a]took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then, he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' ⁷Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' ⁸Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' ⁹Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head.'" Don't you just love Simon Peter? Impetuous, never at loss for words, even when no words were needed, but absolutely clueless about the plan of God. John concludes tonight's Gospel by saying (let's read verses 13-15): *"¹²After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table,**

he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you?' ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.'"

What a remarkable story. The disciples are proud men, arguing over which of them is the greatest, and the most remarkable man they've ever known - whom we have come to know as the very Son of God - wraps a towel around his waist, kneels down in front of each of them - including Judas - and, washes their feet. Now, please, don't view this in your mind as some antiseptic ceremony in a modern and tastefully appointed chapel. If we were to wash one another's feet tonight here at BLC/SMLC/STLC, I am sure we would have prepared for the occasion. We would have first washed our feet at home, put on clean socks, and ridden in a car to get here. But, this was not the setting for the Last Supper in 1st century Palestine. People walked to get where they were going. They walked muddy streets which not only were strewn with garbage but which they also shared with animals who did not mind leaving their waste in the streets. The people didn't wear socks, but open-toed sandals. Their feet would be sweaty, grimy and the smell from their just coming in from the streets would be intolerable. Even worse, they were having a meal. And, they didn't sit around a table as we do today. They were reclining on the floor, leaning on their left elbow while eating with their right hand. Having a neighbor's feet very close to your head was unavoidable. The stench from those feet would have been awful. You and I probably could not have handled it. So, those of you who feel the pastor should have included the washing of feet in tonight's worship celebration - I would be happy to have done it, if we were really going to do it the way it was done back in the day - everyone coming into the church with dirty, smelly feet tonight - then washing one another's feet - now that indeed would have been a ceremony showing humility.

Obviously, the washing of feet back in Jesus' time before the meal was a necessary task under such circumstances, but nonetheless, it was not one for the host to perform. It was far too repulsive. It was a task for the lowliest of servants. But, there was no servant present at the Last Supper. Certainly none of these 12 men arguing over who was the greatest of them would have performed this task. And, so, their Jesus, whom Isaiah once described as Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (9:6), knelt in front of each one and quietly washed the crud from their feet.

Only days before, Jesus had said to the twelve, "...but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave;" (Matthew 20:26-27). The disciples learned that night as never before who was the greatest among them. "Do you know what I have done to you?" Jesus asked them. "You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to

you.” I am not sure Jesus ever intended for “the washing of feet” to be turned into a regular church ceremony, though people who have participated in such ceremonies describe them as liberating and uplifting. And, I have no problem with those ceremonies. But, truly Jesus He meant his disciples, you, and me are meant to love one another, serve one another, and treat one another with respect and love even he showed love and respect to all people. It was the depth of the love that Jesus had – agape love without limits for God children - that motivated Jesus to love and to serve others.

Jesus’ command, his mandate to us this evening, is that we should serve and love on another. When we come to the table this evening, let us come in that same spirit of humility. Christ washed the feet of his disciples. *“Do you understand what I have done for you?”* Jesus asked them. *“You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. “So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.”* Let us go forth from this place tonight, loving and serving one another as Jesus came to love and serve us, today, now, and forever more. Amen.