

The Foot washing Story – John 13:1-17

The sermon today is about the foot washing story. If you ever lose track of where we are, it's about the foot washing story.

Like a newspaper article we are going to ask some ordinary questions about the foot washing story.

The questions are: Where did it happen? When did it happen? What does it tell us about Jesus? What does it mean? And what does it mean for us?

Where did it happen?

The foot washing happens behind closed doors. It happens away from the concerns of the world. Outside there are wars and rumours of wars, there are earthquakes and fires and floods. Outside in Jesus' life there are hassle and threats of the Jewish leaders. There are people bringing sick family members or loved ones to Jesus. All of that is outside.

The foot washing happens in a quiet place where the disciples are gathered with their teacher. It happens at a meal with Jesus. We have meals with Jesus, around this communion table.

It happens in a quiet retreat, the sort of place where the concerns of home and family and ministry are set aside.

When did it happen?

The foot washing happens after the public ministry of Jesus is over. It happens after his coming and before he goes to the cross, before he returns, via the cross to the Father. The foot washing reminds us of the cross where Jesus

will show how much he loves us. But be careful not to jump ahead too quickly to the cross. If you do, you will miss something we must not miss if we want to follow Jesus.

It happens before the mission of the disciples and before the together life of the church. It happens when 'the hour had come'.

Remember back when he and his friends and his mom are at the wedding in Cana. They run out of wine. Mom says, 'they've run out of wine'. Jesus says, 'hey lady, what's that got to do with me? My hour has not yet come!'

Now John tells us that Jesus' hour has come. This is part of 'crunch time' for Jesus.

What does it tell us about Jesus?

What do you notice about Jesus here? This is the question that matters most.

John is very careful to tell us that Jesus is:

-totally aware of 'what hour it is'.

-totally aware of evil at work in the world

-totally aware of the accusers, and that the tempter has gotten to one of his inner circle

-aware that the Father had put all things under Jesus' power

-aware of where he has come from and where he is going

John tells us all this and then he says, 'so'.

So Jesus got up from the table..... It means that what Jesus is about to do, 'wash feet' follows from all the things we are told that he knows.

There's a new tv show out, called Secret Millionaire. We've only seen one episode. Basically, the plot involves a wealthy person who pretends to be a regular joe, who goes to some poor place, works with the people, gets to know them and then later comes back with cash. Undercover Boss is the same kind of story. There are parallels to what Jesus does here. The stories feel kind of the same. Except for that little word, 'so'.

It is odd and unusual for a millionaire or a boss to go 'undercover'. In this story, John tells us that Jesus' character is completely different. It makes total sense to Jesus that he would serve his disciples because that is what he is like.

That is what God is like.

There are strong connections between the gospel of John and Philippians 2. "Jesus, being in very nature God, did not consider being equal with God to be a reason to grasp for more power, but because he is in very nature God, he emptied himself....."

Washing their feet was the natural thing for Jesus to do. Back home, they did that all the time.

His servant towel and robe are not borrowed. He is not pretending to be a servant so that he can go back to ordering people around later.

All power, all authority, all awareness, SO he washes their feet.

What Does it Mean?

The disciples sacrifice their reputations by having their stories told along side Jesus. They don't come off well. But we had better not look down on them. They serve us all.

Peter more than most. The others are uncomfortable with having Jesus work out the dust between their toes. Peter knows that this is wrong.

Life does not work this way.

The one who comes from the Father, with all power and authority, who was anointed last week with \$32,000 worth of perfumed oil, deserves to be worshiped and served. **He** is worthy.

Peter knows he is not worthy. He knows that this is all wrong. It is totally inappropriate.

It goes against everything we know about how life works.

Peter gets that.

(Lesslie Newbigin) And if this was just an object lesson in humility, “Peter could have understood that. **The foot washing is a sign of that ultimate subversion of all human authority which took place when Jesus was crucified by the decision of the powers that rule this present age. In that act, the wisdom of this world was shown to be folly, and the powers of this world were disarmed.** But flesh and blood—ordinary human nature — is in principle incapable of understanding this. It is to the Jew a scandal, to the Greek, folly. Only those whom the risen Christ will call and to whom the Holy Spirit will be given will know that this folly is the wisdom of God, and this weakness is the power of God. At that moment, as the man he is, Peter cannot understand. The natural man makes gods in his own image. A supreme God will be the one who stands at the summit of the chain of command. How can the natural man recognize this supreme God in the stooping figure of a slave clad only with a loincloth?” Lesslie Newbigin

This is who Jesus is. This is a deep insight into the kingdom coming.

This is the grain of the universe. To follow Jesus is not just to trust that he has saved us from our sins, that he has paid for our sins and we may go to heaven when we die. The foot washing is a glimpse of the eternal life. If this way of life does not appeal to you at all, you won't like it much around Jesus, whether now

in the church, or later in heaven. In heaven, the attitude and heart that make mutual foot washing completely normal, is standard operating procedure.

What does the Foot washing mean for us?

It means a fundamental change in us. The first change must be in how we see Jesus. We must see him first as serving us. First as washing our feet. First as dying for us. And we must see the supreme God, here in a towel.

The change is the **way** we are to follow. To make sure we get it, Jesus says it four times. 'As I, now you'. 'As I for you, now you for each other'.

The change Jesus is calling us to, this first Sunday of Lent is this:

To be willing to wash and to be washed, to serve and be served, to help and to be helped.

Jesus says, 'Do this and you will be blessed". Do this and you will experience the living presence of God with you.

What does the Foot washing mean for us?

1. As leaders in the church?

To see clearly that the Jesus we are trying to help people to trust in, is the foot washer, the sufferer, the one who dies out of love for us. It is to be open about our own need to be washed by Jesus, to let him serve us first.

As leaders together, to wash each other's feet, care for each other, be servants to each other. Last week when I spoke at the end of the service about how we are looking for council members, I said, 'when

things are scary we hold hands'. I was not joking. We try to help and encourage each other, to trust in Jesus together.

Trusting in Jesus together is the most important thing we can do for our congregation and community. That is the way of blessing.

2. As church together?

Our friend Victor Ko is pastor of Mosaic House, a church plant on the south side. He spoke at classis about their practice of following every worship service with a communal meal. He said that he has started to say to people, 'if you don't want to bring and share a meal', maybe this is not the church for you.

If you are not willing to serve and be served, to wash and be washed, this may not be the place for you.

This is how Jesus' love and service are completed, this is the purpose and goal of Jesus' love, that we would love and serve each other. This is what Jesus is looking for in our marriages and families and schools and work. (cf Paul in Ephesians) That is the way of blessing.

3. As church to the world?

Here we are in the quiet room with Jesus. Out there is a world crying out for a different kind of people, different kind of leadership, a different god, crying out under oppressive rulers in Egypt and Libya and all other places.

We do not march out as people who simply want to change the occupant on the throne. We don't go out as people with all the answers or

as people who need only lobby to get some laws changed so that everyone will behave.

We've tried that. And we have learned that the church has the capacity to be just as demonic and oppressive as the world. I remind you of apartheid, residential schools, sex abuse scandals, and for some of us, in case we think we have gotten off the hook, the legacy of the Dutch in Indonesia. <http://www.thebanner.org/features/article/?id=2399>

We follow the master who serves. We follow where Jesus leads. We follow in the **way** Jesus leads. We follow taking turns to wash each other's feet. That is the way of blessing.

The Lord be gracious to you.

The Lord be gracious to me.

And all God's people said, Amen.