

SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL

10th September 2017

BI: We can all do something beautiful for Jesus when we serve

Readings: Mark 9:33-25; Philippians 2:5-11

We'll jump straight into our passage. It's John chapter 13 where Jesus does something remarkable and unexpected. Something beautiful.

Prayer

As you're turning to John 13 a word about the setting? It's the night Jesus was betrayed, the evening before his crucifixion. For the last three years he's been proclaiming the Good News that the Kingdom of God is near. Through teaching and example, miracles and healing, Jesus has been showing what the kingdom looks like. His followers are expecting great things. However, they're in for a surprise. The rug's about to be pulled out from them. There'll be one reversal after another - starting with the washing of the disciples' feet.



Now, who would've thought the Messiah would do such a thing? God's only Son doing the work of a slave - never. He who created the heavens and the earth - unthinkable. But, it's about to happen. And in all sorts of ways, this foot washing points to, and gives us fresh understanding, of the cross. So, this morning we'll see:

1. Christ's great love
2. Christ's cleansing
3. Christ's example

We'll then explore the implications for us.

So, John 13:1

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. John 13:1

Here we introduced, not just to the foot washing, but to events of the whole evening - their final meal, Christ's last words to his disciples, his betrayal, arrest, trial and crucifixion. Not only is the tone set, but the "why" is also answered. Why did Jesus wash the disciples' feet, why did he suffer and die? Because...

Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. John 13:1b

I. Christ's Love

Jesus washed the disciples feet because he loved them. Now love is the very reason Jesus came in the first place...

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

And in these his few hours Jesus reveals the full extent of his love. You see, it was not just that the Son of God humbled himself, leaving his his glory, became human, and lived amongst us. Great that this was, this was not the full extent of his love. No, for later he reveals more.

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. John 15:13

Why did Jesus wash his disciples feet? To show his love. Why did Jesus die on the cross? To show the full extent of his love. On the cross we see the full extent of Christ's love, of which the washing of the feet points too. Though lesser, this washing is no less a sign of Jesus great love.

Let's move back to our passage to see where this love takes Jesus

The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 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. Jn 13:2–5

And we underestimate the shock experienced by the disciples and the original readers of John's Gospel. For in one verse we read God has put all things under Jesus' power - everything in heaven, on earth and under the earth. Imagine the most powerful man alive then, Caesar, or the most powerful man alive today, Trump - maybe. Well we're told Jesus is way more powerful than these in these verse, and in the next Jesus wears the clothes of a servant. Caesar, Trump doing that? I don't think so. Taking off his outer garment and wrapping a towel around his waist are acts of a slave. And not just any slave. In 1st century Palestine a Jewish slave would not wash feet. It was considered too demeaning. Foot washing was reserved for gentile slaves. And so we're reminded of Philipians 2. Speaking of Jesus it says...

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant. Philipians 2:6–7

Being in very nature God, Jesus chose to make himself a lowest of the low, servant.

To this Peter objects. What the others are thinking, Peter blurts out.

“Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”... “No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet. John 13:6 & 8

However, Christ’s rebuke is firm.

Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me... A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean.” John 13:8 & 10

And here Jesus indicates what this foot washing is about.

II. Christ’s cleansing

Just as this is an expression of Christ’s love ultimately fulfilled on the cross, Christ’s washing their feet is an expression of cleansing ultimately fulfilled on the cross. Though the disciples are washed by water now, soon they’ll be washed by his blood. Blood poured out, not into a basin, but on a cross. Though just their feet are washed now, because of the cross they’ll soon be washed all over, through and through, top to toe.

And, in this foot washing we learn two valuable lessons about the work of the cross. First, unless we are cleansed by Jesus we can have no part of him. Being cleansed by Jesus is non-negotiable. We cannot come to him on our terms, with our agenda. Not all. We must come to Jesus first and foremost to be cleansed. How do we do this? Well many years John wrote a letter. And in this letter we read the answer - 1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

How are we cleansed? When we confess our sins. As we confess, as we repent and turn back to God, Jesus promises to forgive and cleanse. And unless we confess we can have no part of Christ. Unless we let him cleanse us he will have no part in us. For, again in 1 John...

If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. 1 John 1:10

This is the first thing we learn Jesus’ response to Peter’s dramatic refusal to have his feet washed. The second thing we learn is found in verse 10

Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." John 13:10

What Jesus is saying is, "My forgiveness is total and complete. My death on the cross will cleanse you once and for all. However, afterwards - when you sin these new sins will be washed away like washing a clean man's dirty feet. Though you need to confess your sins, this in no way means your fundamental cleansing needs repeating."

This then is what we learn about the cleansing work of the cross. It is non-negotiable and is total and complete.

After washing the last foot, Jesus rises from his knees and takes his seat back at the table. And with disciples around him he explains the implications of what he's just done. And in this explanation we see

III. Christ's Example

Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "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

Knowing this is their last evening together Jesus now sets the standard for when he's gone. For just a week or so before when traveling to Jerusalem these disciples had argued on the road. About what? Which was the greatest. Jesus knows the danger of this one-upmanship, this jostling for position, this strutting of egos. It tear friendships and communities apart. Back then he corrected them, finishing with these words...

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Mark 10:45

He's saying, "If anyone has the right to Lord it over you, it's me. But I haven't. And I won't. As you have seen me serve, serve one another. As you have seen me wash feet, wash one another. As you will see me lay down my life, you also lay down your life for one another. And when you do you'll be blessed for verse 17 closes with...

Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. John 13:17

Blessed we will be, when we follow Christ's example - as we serve one another. You see, that evening on the night he was betrayed, Jesus did a beautiful thing. Especially when you remember that Judas would betray him, Peter would deny him and Thomas would doubt him. Know this full well, Jesus still washed their feet.

So, what are the implications for us? Given that this foot washing demonstrates Christ's love, his cleansing and example, what are we to do?

Well, when it comes to the practical, the hands on, we call called to serve one another.

And, what does this look like? From welcoming at the door, to singing in the music team, from helping in the kitchen to praying for folk after church, from attending a working Bee to leading a home group, from dropping a meal around to serving as an elder. These are all practical ways to serve one another. There are more, some listened in this mornings bulletin.

But serving, well it's hard. A minister preparing a sermon on serving asked on Facebook page question: "What makes it hard for you to serve other people?"

Someone posted... *Serving is hard when it doesn't fit in to my schedule . Like when I want to go for a walk or take a long bath, but my aging parent needs me to sort their meds, run an errand, or simply be with them.*

Another...*It's hard when their need seems endless. I don't want to risk helping/serving because I may get sucked in. Being swallowed up in the serving and not getting to be the me I think I am or should be*

One more...*There's such limited energy left after a demanding workday meeting our basic responsibilities. How do you balance the need for rest and self-care with serving others?*

And these are very real concerns. But remember Jesus promised something. He promised we will be blessed when we serve others. Is it true? Or is the preacher just setting you up for the next church roster?

With the question of blessing in mind another minister surveyed his church with this question: "To what extent has your ministry or service to others affected your spiritual growth?"

Ninety two percent answered positively. No one (0%) answered negatively. Sixty-three percent indicated that service was equally significant in their spiritual growth compared to Bible study and prayer.

But also, and this is a surprise, twenty-four percent responded ministry or service to others was "a more significant factor" to their spiritual growth than Bible study or prayer.

Over half (58 percent) of those who were not actively serving others felt either "not satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with their level of spiritual growth.

The evidence is clear. Though serving others is hard, the benefits are huge. Jesus must have known what he was talking about when he said

Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. John 13:17

Now, I've titled this sermon, Something Beautiful. Why? Because what Jesus did was not only surprising - shocking even - but beautiful. Any service, big or small, simple or involved when done for Christ is beautiful.

Best selling author Tim Winton tells this story. When he was growing up in Australia his father had a serious motorcycle accident. After weeks in a coma he was allowed home and as a five year old didn't really understand what was happening. Now, his dad was a big man and Winton's mother had trouble caring for him, especially bathing. News filtered through the community and one day there was a knock on the door.

"Oh, g'day. My name's Len," said a stranger to Winton's mum. "I heard your hubby's a bit unwell. Anything I can do?"

Len was from the local church and wanted to help.

Winton wrote, "He just showed up. He used to carry my dad from bed and put him in the bath, and he used to bathe him, which in the 1960s Australia was not the sort of thing you saw every day. It really touched me... That a grown man would bother, for nothing, to show up and wash a sick man—you know, it really affected me."

Winton went on to say this sacrificial act was the doorway into which his whole family came to Christian faith.

Serving one another, whether it's Christ washing his disciples' feet, serving one another here at GPC or Len bathing a crippled man - when done for Christ - is a beautiful thing. Let us serve one another as we look to Christ - to his love, his cleansing and his wonderful example. Let's pray...