Sermon- Servanthood Reinvented

Scripture: John 13:1-17 Sunday, July 30, 2017

Today we are going to look at the second part of the sermon on service. Last Sunday we looked at how, we can bless people by giving them an opportunity to serve God and his church. We looked at how Jesus did this throughout his ministry and the impact it had on the people he provided these service opportunities. Today, we are going to turn the tables on this and look at how we should be serving those around us the way Jesus modeled it for us. And to do that we are going to examine a very powerful act, Jesus washing his disciple’s feet.

Come with me for a few moments to be part of that special evening, the Last supper. It was the time to celebrate the Passover, festival that combines the theological significance of Easter with the excitement of Christmas. And this Passover was going to be Jesus’ last Passover and one of his last opportunities to teach his disciples before he hangs on the cross. So Jesus had to choose an extremely important lesson.

For the disciples as they were coming to their third Passover celebration with Jesus, they are thinking of the Passovers of these last years. It has been a very interesting three years. They lay down their fishing nets and farming implements and tax collecting jobs to follow someone who they thought was the messiah that scripture had profesied about. They certainly learnt so much, they saw so many lives touched, had crowds so big that Jesus taught from a boat in the water. They saw so many miracles. They were with someone with more miraculous power that Elijah, more authority than Moses, more wisdom than Solomon. This man seemed to have power over evil spirits, he had power over diseases and power even over the wind and water.

And Jesus always took care of things in the most amazing way. That this very Passover that they were going to celebrate. Somehow even though we are a wandering bunch, with no property, not even homes that are our own, somehow are teacher has arranged for a place, catered the meal and taken care of the expenses. Just look at this place. This is a nice big room, tables laid out, bread, wine and everything else needed for the meal all set-up. It is almost like Jesus has power over reality itself!

 Now pretend you were a fly on the wall as the group gathers into the room. The tables are laid out for 13 people. In those days they would recline at the table which meant that you would have to put your feet up on the recliner. And so before you did that you would have servants who would wash the dirt of your feet which would be smelly and dirty after walking all day in open sandals on crowded dirt roads. Now these men have gathered in the room and all the arrangements are made except for the servants to wash the feet of the men. So the group is looking around, not sure about what to do next when they see Jesus, their master, teacher, miraculous provider and host of the evening removing his outer garment, tying a towel around his waist and kneeling down to wash their feet? Can you picture how uncomfortable that feels? I don’t know what would be the equivalent of that for you. Perhaps if your elderly father were to wash your feet? Someone whom you hold in extremely high esteem and honor, doing the most menial and lowly task for you. It would be cringe inducing. I was at a footwashing ceremony once where they said, if having your feet washed makes you uncomfortable, they you can have your hand washed instead. Now I understand that. But, I think it defeats the whole purpose. Jesus was no fool. He knew exactly how it would make them feel. In fact, it was Peter who speaks up and tells Jesus that he would never let Jesus wash his feet. To which Jesus replies, if you don’t let me wash your feet, you have no part in my ministry. That shocked Peter and stunned everybody in the room. They knew that they had to just shut-up and let Jesus do it even if they did not understand it all, then like almost everything else Jesus had taught them these three years.

So they sat through it anyway. They allowed Jesus their master to serve them. And something inside of them changed as they walked through the door of awkward and passed through the valley of extremely uncomfortable. Its be in the valley of extremely uncomfortable for a minute. You see when Peter expressed his discomfort to Jesus, remember at that time, they knew more about Jesus than most people on earth, but they still did not know that He was God. That they only figured out after he walked out of the grave. And did not realize that he even though he was God would die for their sins. That they only realized when they looked back at the events of the last week when they broke bread with Jesus for the first time after his resurrection. And everytime they learnt something more about who Jesus was and then though about that day when he washed they feet, you can see their cringe level only increasing till it really maxed out. What can be more cringe inducing that knowing that God himself, died for your sins and has washed your dirty smelly feet!

But they don’t stay in that valley but realize that all that cringe induction was to change then down to tehir very core so that they too could be servants just like Jesus was.

So before we get to serving others, the real ministry of Jesus, the question to each one of us is this, “have you allowed Jesus to wash your feet? Have you allowed Jesus to serve your deepest needs? Have you allowed Jesus Christ to take away everything that afflicts you, your tiredness, your pain, your doubts, your fears, your weaknesses, your sins. All the dirt that you have. Actually all the dirtiest dirt that you have. Have you allowed Jesus Christ to get to the dirtiest parts of your life and wash it for you?

If you have, and only if you have, then you are ready for what comes next. I never want to assume everyone of us has. So here is what I would like each of you to do. We are going to pray right now and ask God to come into the parts of you that are really messed up, maybe it is something you did that still nags you, maybe it is something that was done to you and significantly impacted you, maybe it is something that has a terrible hold of you right now. Whatever it is we are going to pray about it right now. After that, if you feel you need to unburden yourself and just be prayed for feel free to reach out to me afterwards.

Once, Christ has cleansed you, you will feel clean. You will feel like a new person and you will be ready to be the servant that Christ has called you to be. There are three things about this new servanthood that I would like to reinforce this morning.

The first thing about the servanthood that Christ reinvented is deals with the “who”. Who is the servant according to Christ? To understand this we need to step into the before Christ world. In the before Christ world, different people have different levels of power in society. In the secular world, the power you have is based on your wealth, your connections and your position in society. And when you have power you have to do everything to keep that power so you make those people who have less power than you in your territory serve your interests. And the people who have the lesser power are the servants of the people who have more power. The servants in the secular world serve to get something from the person they are serving. The secular boss is someone who will lord it over his or her servants. That is how it works. What Jesus does is he inverts the pyramid. So he says, if you are the boss, that means the one with most power in the group, to be Christlike, you have to use that power to serve the needs of those with lesser power than you. That makes the boss the servant of those who he has power over. And if you are the one with the lesser power in the group, you should serve the one who has authority over you like you are serving God. Let me give you an example from the Bible. You see Moses as a leader of the Israelites who had absolute power over them. If he saw it fit he could put 20,000 people to dead in one day. Now you don’t get more powerful than that. But no matter how powerful Moses was, Moses job was to serve the people he was placed in charge off. And not the other way around. Of course Moses was owed all the respect and obedience due to him. But ultimately Moses was there to do something for those million people. He had a job assigned to shepherd the group into the promised land. When you think of Moses you never thing of the power he had, you always thing of what he did for his people. And he lead his people as the most humble person of all of them. So servanthood is for the most powerful person in the group, the least powerful and everyone in between. The nature of what you do is different, but each person in God’s kingdom has a service mission and that makes everybody in the group somebodies servant.

The next question is, “how does God’s servant discharge his duties?” To figure that out we look again at the first set of Jesus’ disciples. You see once you have your feet washed by Jesus, it changes you down to your DNA. Once you realize that God died a brutal and humiliating death for your sins, there is no limit to what we are willing to suffer to communicate the message of salvation to a lost soul. Because you want them to have what Christ gave you.

When you look at the disciples, Jesus Christ, gave them a new family of disciples. They wanted others to have it too, so at Jesus’ command they organized people into communities like their own and called it the church. Jesus took care of their physical needs and spiritual needs. So when they went out to serve people, they did the same thing. They shared their resources, fed widows and orphans, healed the sick, drove out demons, and invited people to follow Jesus just like they had. So what kind of servants were they? They were the kind of servants that did for others what Christ had done for them, taking them from lost and confused souls to souls that we deeply satisfied who became disciples of Christ and full of love for others.

We looked at who is the servant, from Christ’s point of view. Everyone. irrespective of position in hierarchy. What does a Christlike servant do? They pour out love on everyone and in the process they transform hearts and turn lost souls into disciples of Christ.

The final question is why does Jesus bother to redefine servanthood? Actually allow me to let you in on a little secret. Jesus does not redefine servanthood, Jesus is reclaiming the original definition of servanthood. You see, there are at least 17 versus in the Old Testament alone that describe God and man’s helper. Hebrews 13:6, The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid! Or Ps 121:1-2 I lift my eyes to the hills, where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. God was always playing the role of our helper. When we reject the true God, it is at that point that it becomes about us and our own pride and when it becomes about us, then fallen human beings use their little power to lord it over others. And servanthood became something the person with lesser power was forced to do. So Jesus Christ comes along and says, let me tell you how it was always supposed to be fellas! I am washing your feet and I am God. So go and serve someone around you, irrespective of their station in life. When that happens they will get to experience a little bit of Christ for themselves and that is enough to transform someone’s heart. And when you transform a heart you change the world.

So what if our church unleashed a bunch of Christlike servants into our neighborhood? What would that look like? What are the needs in our neighborhood that we can help with? Well, I know we are a small church but, here is a thought. What if we began with the churches in our neighborhood. What if when they had a need we helped out in someway. Sometimes all a church needs is someone to help preach on a given Sunday. Or sometimes they need help with their food pantry or Sunday school. Besides churches, we have schools, we have grocery stores, we have parks, we have all kinds of organizations and just places that people gather. What if we found a way to meet some need in our neighborhood? But remember we cannot give the neighborhood something we ourselves don’t have. If we have not let Christ wash the dirtiest part of us, we have no part in his ministry. Those are his words. So let’s allow Christ to give into our lives and wash us a new today. And when we are cleaned, Christ will put on our hearts how we can go wash someone’s feet in our neighborhood. Let us pray.