SPECIAL PRE-RECORDED ONLINE SERVICE
LEARNING TO SERVE AND BE SERVED
John 13:1-17

CALL TO WORSHIP (Ephesians 2:8-10 & Romans 12:1-2

Leader: It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

People: 10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Leader: Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

All: 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

SCRIPTURE READING – JOHN 13:1-7

Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet

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.

SERMON – LEARNING TO SERVE AND BE SERVED

John 13:1-17

INTRO

I want to start with a story today. It’s a well known philosophical and religious story. It is often credited to a Jewish Rabbi – Rabbi Haim of Romshishok.

It goes by one of 2 names. It is either called the Parable of Heaven and Hell, or the Parable of the Long Spoons. Listen now as I tell you the allegory.

One day a man said to God, “God, I would like to know what Heaven and Hell are like.”

God showed the man two doors. Inside the first one, in the middle of the room, was a large round table with a large pot of [yummy] stew. It smelled delicious and made the man’s mouth water, but the people sitting around the table were thin and sickly. They appeared to be famished. They were holding spoons with very long handles and each found it possible to reach into the pot of stew and take a spoonful, but because the handle was longer than their arms, and their arms were in splints that prevented them from bending their elbows, no-one could not get the spoons back into their mouths.

The man shuddered at the sight of their misery and suffering. God said, "You have seen Hell."

Behind the second door, the room appeared exactly the same. There was the large round table with the large pot of wonderful [delicious] stew that made the man's mouth water. The people had the same long-handled spoons, and splints on the arms, but they were well nourished and plump, laughing and talking.

The man said, "I don't understand."

God smiled. It is simple, he said, Love only requires one skill.

Those in heaven have learned to serve one another, sharing what they have and feeding one another. While those in hell think only of themselves.[i]

While Jewish in origins, this story has spread across the religious divide and appears in Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and Middle-Eastern folk-lore. In Chinese adaptions, the utensils are long chopsticks instead of spoons.

The fact that this allegory has such universal appeal suggests that people everywhere need help grasping the idea that serving others, by helping and nourishing them, is the best way to ensure everyone's needs are met. We cannot thrive in isolation or by simply pursuing our own self-interests.

Learning to serve others and to be served in return are 2 necessary skills we must learn if we are to experience heaven on earth.

Jesus' closest friends struggled with this very thing. They were often preoccupied with who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. They even argued over who would get to sit at Jesus' right and left hand when he came into his kingdom. In response,

> ***25*** *Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.* ***26*** *Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,* ***27*** *and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—* ***28*** *just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." – Matthew 20:25-28*

These were not just empty platitudes Jesus gave lip service to. These were the words Jesus lived and died by.

> *the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

In the scripture passage Mike Clark read for us a few minutes ago, we are told that:

> *It was just before the Passover 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. – John 13:1*

Some translations say, “He now showed them the full extent of his love.”

I want to read you a devotional about this. It comes from my favorite version of the Bible. The NIV Prayer and Devotional Bible. As you can see, I mark my Bible up quite a bit. I underline, highlight, write notes in the margins. I happen to like this version very much because it includes little devotionals and prayers and more modern-day stories that help me think more deeply about a passage I’m reading and see examples of how people live it out today. This devotional is called, ‘Maximum Love, Not Minimum Love.”

Page 1301 – NIV Prayer Devotional Bible – Zondervan Copyright 2004. Grand Rapids, Michigan.

19"I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He. 20I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me."

21After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me."

22His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. 23One of them, the disciple whom Jesus

THURSDAY

JOHN 13:1–17

Maximum Love, Not Minimum Love

13:1 HAVING LOVED HIS OWN WHO WERE IN THE WORLD, HE NOW SHOWED THEM THE FULL EXTENT OF HIS LOVE.

The disciples were in no mood for what Jesus did at dinner that night. Their mood was competitive. Still glowing from the enthusiastic reception the crowds gave them the Sunday before, they were arguing with each other, preoccupied with the rank they would get when their master's kingdom was established (see Luke 22:24).

Jesus' mood was very different. He was absolutely clear on what lay ahead. He would soon die. There was glory and a kingdom ahead, but the path was one of suffering. As the disciples chattered, he looked at how dirty their feet were. They had no clue—no idea what was going on. And he loved them.

According to some ancient Jewish sources, the task of footwashing was regarded as so menial that slaves couldn't be forced to do such demeaning service. It was up to the individual slave's discretion whether to wash the guests' feet, which appears to be the point here. In the room was a collection of mere individuals, men arguing about what belonged to them, relating to each other in a minimal way.[8] There was no breach of etiquette, nor was there any love. They weren't brothers; they were associates.

And Jesus loved them. So he sought them out. Without fanfare, he got up and began to relate to his men in a *maximal* way; and as he washed their feet, he practiced the opposite of what they were practicing. They weren't in the mood for this sort of thing, and Peter's response summed up their feelings: "No! Never!" But it was too late, for Jesus had already penetrated their defenses. When Jesus said, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me," Peter could only reply, "Then, Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" (John 13:8–9).

Jesus had made his point visually, but lest they miss it, he made it verbally: "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (verse 15). A little later he said that this kind of love will inform and enlighten the world (see 13:34–35). In other words, you must seek each other out as I have sought you. You dare not be mere individuals, getting along politely and minimally. The world must see clearly that you belong to me; and the only way it will know that is if you belong to each other in the same way you belong to me.

PRAY:

Jesus, you have commanded it, so we pray it:
May we love one another as you have loved us.

FOR YOUR NEXT DEVOTIONAL READING, GO TO PAGE 1303.

This sounds a bit like the point of the parable of heaven and hell doesn't it? The point is very similar:

> **We must learn to serve and be served if we are to find heaven on earth.**

Let's unpack that a little more by asking and answering this next question.

What do you think made it so hard for Peter to let Jesus serve him by washing his feet?

There were several things going on for Peter[ii].

1. Cultural norms made it unthinkable to Peter that Jesus would assume this role. As noted already in the devotional, it was the lowest household servant who would wash the dusty, dirty feet of a guest. And maybe even then, the lowest wouldn't do it. So, for Jesus to assume the role of the lowest servant would put him on the lowest rung of the societal ladder.

2. This didn't mesh with Peter's understanding of who Jesus was supposed to be. Shortly before this, Peter had made his declaration that he understood Jesus to the be the Christ, the Messiah of God, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16). Peter was expecting an earthly kingdom with a Messiah who would overthrow the Roman oppressors. God's Messiah was expected to lead the charge, to be a king, to be royal, to exude power and authority. In what kind of upside-down world does the king become the servant? Peter was grappling with his shock.

3. In so doing, he misunderstood the symbolic link between the washing of the feet Jesus was doing and the spiritual washing that the act symbolized. To Peter, this act of foot washing was demeaning to Jesus, the King. And by association it was thus demeaning to Peter. His initial indignation covers a certain amount of pride doesn't it. If his teacher is a lowly servant instead of the King, what does that make Peter?

4. So, Jesus had to help Peter understand the true significance of what he was doing. For Jesus, the King, the Messiah of God, this humble act of service, this washing of the disciples' feet, was a pre-cursor to the ultimate act of service and cleansing Jesus would do when he went to the cross to die for their sins the very next day. A Jesus would let his blood be shed on the cross for the forgiveness of

> their sins and of ours, he would spiritually cleanse all those who would come to believe in Him as the Son of God.

So, he tells Peter, You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand," and therefore, "Unless I wash you, you have not part with me."

Peter might not have understood all that was happening in the moment, but he trusted Jesus and he knew he wanted to be counted with Jesus, he wanted to be part of him. And so, he said: "Okay then, don't just wash my feet but wash all of me – my hands and my head as well."

Peter wanted all in. Nothing half-way for Peter. He was ready to let Jesus serve him so he could be part of what Jesus was doing.

And Jesus replied, "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 everyone was clean."

So, the symbolism begins to become clear. In this symbolism, the bath Jesus is referring to represents salvation. It's what we get when we put our faith in Jesus. It's a one-time thing. One and done.

But the washing of the feet is what happens on a regular basis. It's the process of sanctification, where we daily confess our wrong doings and ask God's forgiveness and let him wash us clean and help us to grow to be more like him.

The service Jesus was offering Peter on the surface was clean feet, but on a much deeper level, it was a clean heart and clean spirit and a right relationship with God.

Even as he helped Peter understand this, Jesus set up a contrast as well. Jesus said to Peter:

> *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 everyone was clean.*

The contrast Jesus spoke of between the clean and the unclean was this: Judas, who would betray Jesus that very night, allowed Jesus to serve him externally by washing his feet, and yet internally his heart remained hard and untouched. On the outside, he appeared to go along with what Jesus was doing…he would have been part of feeding the 5,000 with a few loaves and fishes, he would have been in the boat when Jesus calmed the wind and waves with his voice, he would have been

part of casting out demons in Jesus' name. But his subsequent betrayal of Jesus showed that his heart had not really been changed.

On the other hand, Peter initially resisted Jesus' efforts to wash his feet due to his cognitive dissonance. The King, the Messiah, should not be taking the role of a servant and demeaning himself this way to wash Peter's feet. But when he understood there was spiritual symbolism in what Jesus was showing him, he surrendered himself fully to Jesus. He let Jesus serve him and wash him clean – both physically and spiritually.

What do you think makes it hard for people today to let Jesus serve them by washing them clean spiritually – with either a metaphorical spiritual foot washing or a metaphorical spiritual bath? Perhaps like Peter there are cultural norms that distort our understandings of who God and Jesus truly are. Perhaps there is also pride – not wanting to appear weak or that we need help or admitting that we've done something wrong that needs forgiveness and grace. Maybe like Judas, people don't want to give up control. Judas was trying to force God's hand when he betrayed Jesus. He was trying to force him to bring about a rebellion and take the government by force. He wasn't expecting Jesus to simply give in and be led to his death without a fight. Judas was trying to make God in his image, and so his heart remained hard and far from God. Perhaps it is that way for some people today as well. Perhaps they want God to do things on their terms and not are willing to accept his plan and will.

How about for you? How are you responding to Jesus' invitation to cleanse you and serve you spiritually as well? Are you responding more like Peter who allowed Jesus to teach him the truth and was therefore changed in the process? Or are you more like Judas who looked like he was a follower on the outside, but remained untouched on the inside? Judas was in the close circle of friends that Jesus kept, he was there at the last supper. He dipped his hand in the cup along with everyone else. He looked just like any of the other disciples on the outside. But his heart was far from God. And Jesus knew his heart. And Jesus knows our hearts as well. Where is your heart in relationship to Jesus and to God today?

Will this be the day that you go all in for Jesus, just like Peter did? Will church become more to you than just a social club or a place to be with friends? Will you earnestly seek Jesus' will and desire for your life and your resources? Will you surrender your life and let him serve you by washing you spiritually clean so that you can belong to him and have a right relationship with God?

Letting Jesus serve us as Peter did, so that he can wash us clean, is the first step to finding heaven on earth. But once we have learned to be served, we must also learn to serve others as Jesus did too.

Having helped Peter to understand the spiritual symbolism of what was happening, we read that:

> *2 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.*

So, Jesus clearly told his disciples that as he has served them, they were to follow his example and serve one another as well. What starts with spiritual cleansing and coming into right relationship with God is then lived out in service to others. Having declared that he wanted all in for Jesus, Peter followed through on this call to serve others.

After Jesus died on the cross for Peter’s sins and Judas’s sins and our sins, and after Jesus rose from the grave, he commissioned Peter to feed his sheep (Johne 21). Peter went on to be a great leader in the early church and wrote several books we find in the Bible still today. Let me read you a few verses from 1 Peter 5.

> ***5*** *To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain,* ***but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.*** *4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.*
>
> *5 In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because,*
>
> *“God opposes the proud*
> *but shows favor to the humble.”*
>
> *6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. 7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

He begins his second letter with these words: -

> *Simon Peter, **a servant** and apostle of Jesus Christ,*
>
> *To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours:*
>
> ***2** Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. (2 Peter 1:1-2)*

Peter took this call to become a servant so seriously that he referred to himself as "a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ."

The early church practiced servant leadership, setting up the ministry of Deacons so that food could be distributed to those in need (Act 6:204) and widows and orphans could be taken care of.

Clearly, as Peter learned to be served by Jesus, he also learned to serve in Jesus' name.

CONCLUSION

God's kingdom is an upside-down kingdom. It doesn't work the way the world works. In the world's way of doing things, those at the top are served by those below. So, for example, if you are on the JV team in a school sport, you might find yourself setting up for and tearing down after a varsity team game. Or, if you are climbing the ladder at work, you might expect more perks than the folks below you in the corporate structure. That's what the world expects.

But Jesus turned that on its head when he said, "If you want to be great in my kingdom, learn to be a servant." And when he said:

> ***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.*

Some of us find hard to serve others, and some of us find it hard to let others serve us. But we must learn to do this if we are to part of God's kingdom.

Certainly, there are barriers to overcome – pride, fear of rejection, fear of burdening others, perceived lack of resources, uncertainty about expectations. But all these things, if we are willing, can be overcome.

This weekend we have been the recipients of other's hard work and service to us. About 100 volunteers have come to our campus to serve us and the schools we house. How do you feel about that? Is it hard for you to be on the receiving end?

Sometimes in the kingdom of God, we must allow others to serve us. At other times we are asked to serve.

Which is harder for you? Is it harder for you to serve others? Are you always wanting others to take care of you? Or is it harder for you to receive help? Do you prefer to be the helper instead of the helpee?

Let me remind you of the parable of the long spoons we started our message with today. When as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we can learn to live together in love, both giving and receiving nourishment and help and support, then we can begin to have a taste of what heaven truly is.

Let's Pray -

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[i] https://sofoarchon.com/heaven-and-hell-the-parable-of-the-long-spoons/
These people learned early on to share and feed one another. While the greedy only think of themselves…
https://spiritualgrowthevents.com/spiritual-short-story-360-parable-of-the-spoons/
https://jareddees.com/longspoons-parable/

[ii] https://biblehub.com/q/Why_does_Peter_reject_Jesus_foot_washing.htm
Much of the structure of these 4 points was shaped by this article.