

SECOND READING: John 13:1-17

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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. <sup>2</sup>The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper <sup>3</sup>Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, <sup>4</sup>got up from the table,<sup>[a]</sup> took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. <sup>5</sup>Then 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. <sup>6</sup>He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" <sup>7</sup>Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." <sup>8</sup>Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." <sup>9</sup>Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" <sup>10</sup>Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet,<sup>[b]</sup> but is entirely clean. And you<sup>[c]</sup> are clean, though not all of you." <sup>11</sup>For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

<sup>12</sup>After 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? <sup>13</sup>You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup>So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup>For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup>Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. <sup>17</sup>If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

"This is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God.**

FIRST READING: Matthew 20:25-28

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<sup>25</sup>But Jesus called to [his disciples] and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. <sup>26</sup>It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup>and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; <sup>28</sup>just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

This is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God.**

"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."Theodor Seuss Geisel, aka Dr. Seuss

### **“Mark #3 Empowering Servant Leadership”**

*It was only after the rice ran out that the British soldier noticed her the second time. Her tiny face crumpled as it dawned on her that she would get no food that day. Even in the emaciated crowd, she was smaller and thinner than the rest, easily pushed aside as stronger ones shoved their way to the front. The soldier had first spotted her under a scrawny tree as his aid convoy approached the refugee camp. But he'd forgotten her, focusing on the chaotic scene at hand. He and his comrades in arms were to protect the convoy from warlords and rioters. Sometimes even starving aid-seekers became unruly. After the crowd disbursed, she remained, and her haunting eyes met his. He then remembered the banana he'd tossed in his pack at breakfast. He pulled it out and walked over to offer it to her. She took it silently. He watched her make her way back to the tree, and only then he perceived two little boys lying in its shade, too weak to get up. She peeled the banana, broke it in two, and gave a piece to each of them. Then she ate the peel. “It was the most moving illustration of servant leadership I have ever seen,” he told me years later. “She changed the course of my life. I resigned from my career to follow her example, serving with communities in need in Africa,” he said. What was the power of this little girl to change a battle-hardened fighter's heart? The soldiers and the humanitarians were ostensibly there “to serve.” They had the aid, the arms, the answers. But she offered something more rare, more vital (repeat). She offered humble love.<sup>1</sup> (Report-Dreams Indeed Internat'l)*

Friends, this is what Jesus' example of washing the disciples' feet on his final night with them was all about, that is, servant leadership, part of the broader “*new commandment*” (i.e. to love one another as he had loved them). (*pause*) Scripture tells us that Peter gave voice to what seemed the scandal of it all. “*Lord, are you going to wash my feet?*,” he said. For indeed, he could not believe that the Messiah, the Son of the Living God should take on the menial task that a slave usually did, and chose to demonstrate his love for them in a such a way as to wash their dirty, dusty, smelly feet! But that's exactly what Jesus did. He, “laid aside the

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<sup>1</sup> Anon. Dreams Indeed International. “*Recognizing Servant-Leaders – Not Drum Majors*” <https://www.dreamsindeed.org/news/recognizing-servant-leaders-not-drum-majors/> (accessed 2-21-20).

clothes of glory and put on our human nature”.<sup>2</sup> He humbly washed their feet and, in essence said, *“this is who God is...I am the One who has come to be with and for human kind...And this is the kind of love I send you to out to show others in my name.”* This act of extravagant love pointed to the even greater scandal to come in the dark hours ahead, when Jesus would lay down his life on behalf of all of us, crucified on a Roman cross, the form of execution reserved for criminals and slaves.

Yes, on his final night, Jesus showed his disciples and us that this commandment meant caring for the Other, humbly sacrificing and submitting one’s all, if needed. This included surrendering the position of being in charge, deciding who and when to serve.<sup>3</sup> Jesus washed ALL the disciples’ feet, even and maybe especially Judas’, loving every one of them fully and completely, without expecting anything in return, not from those who disappointed him, hurt and betrayed him, not from those who returned his love. As Richard Foster says, “A servant leader is available and vulnerable to those they serve...Ego short-circuits it all.”<sup>4</sup> Jesus said elsewhere, *“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them....but whoever wishes to be great among YOU must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among YOU must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*(Mt 20:25-28). Yes, Jesus, the One who came to serve and not be served, loved all to the very end ... gathering his disciples and us with him into this final act ...humbly washing feet.

Part of the Vital Congregation Initiative is to assess this, Mark #3, Empowering Servant Leadership, in our church, FPC-CC. As such, we need consider things then as:

1. Whether we, as servant leaders, embrace the messy and menial tasks, the things which in the ancient world the slave would do? Do we willingly do that which is distasteful, ugly, and lowly? Do we visit the sick even if the sick are not so pleasant, or a little scary or needing help in the middle of the night? Do we roll up our sleeves without complaint or

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<sup>2</sup> NT Wright. *John for Everyone*. (Louisville: WJKP;2002),48.

<sup>3</sup>Nancy Olson. *“Refreshing Your Philosophy of Servant Leadership: as a Christian Librarian.”* The Christian Librarian: 2010; Vol 53(2);47-55.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, rev. ed (New York: Harper San Francisco; 1988), 132.

boasting to pull the weeds or put out the garbage? Do we stay behind after the long meeting to sit with the one whose ride is late?<sup>5</sup> If our answer is yes, (which I think it probably is), then we also need consider...

2. Whether we, as a church, recognize that the menial tasks that we are called to perform may, may also point us toward the much larger challenge of following Jesus to greater sacrifice, to the cross? This question can lead us out of these walls into the broken world and the difficult times that we live in. Imagine if you would...just imagine how the world would be changed if servant leaders everywhere were the ones who were in key places of decision- making. Imagine the changed state of affairs if care for others was the directive everywhere rather than domination and force... where people were the end goal, not tools to the end ...where a passion to serve others was the norm rather than service of self. Imagine what things would be like. Just imagine it...on the Home, Community, State, Nation, Global level? And imagine how we might have a role, how we might fulfill the commission, fraught with risk and threat as it might be, to bring that to bear. (*pause*) And imagining this, then also consider

3. How we, the Church, could better empower and support servant leadership for the task.

4. What aspects to being a servant leader should we support more? (i.e. should we be better helping to identify/ affirm people's spiritual gifts, teaching people to communicate more effectively, or how to build trust in those we serve?)<sup>6</sup>

These are important questions for us to ask, for we are a growing church, still relatively small but trying to do so many great things for Christ. And we know that if we want to effect real change, to do even greater things, in our church and in the world, (and we can, yes we can), we need to be mindful that displaying an attitude of humble service, witnessing to all others that treating one another in a way such that love is more important than life itself is what we as Christ's disciples are all about. <sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> NT Wright. "John for Everyone. (Louisville: WJKP;2002),48.

<sup>6</sup> Nancy Olson. "Refreshing Your Philosophy of Servant Leadership: as a Christian Librarian." The Christian Librarian: 2010; Vol 53(2);47-55.

<sup>7</sup>Audrey West. "Commentary John 13:1-17, 31b-35." [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=292](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=292). (accessed 2-20-20).

Robert Greenleaf, author of Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness writes, “*After decades of development work, we’ve only seen real, sustained change when leaders are servants. (repeat) And interestingly, the best test we’ve found of the effectiveness of servant leadership is when we’ve watched those they’ve served. We’ve asked “Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? The conclusion? The stronger the servant leadership, the more those they’ve served grow as persons. Greenleaf goes on, “And we’ve examined what the effect is on the least privileged in society too, for only being served out of love honors their dignity transformatively. Only being served out of love affirms their identity and restores their hope.”*<sup>8</sup>

Yes, friends, if we, FPC, want to effect real and GREAT change in our church and in the world, (and we can, we are) we need pattern our lives after Jesus’ example of humble love on his final night. We need be like him, here to serve and not be served. We are forgiven and free, without fear of sin, without fear of death. What’s to stop us from stepping up and out to do great things, via any sized task, for the Kingdom, here and now? (*pause*). As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, affirming what that starving girl knew to be true under that scrawny tree: “*Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve... You don’t have to have a college degree to serve. You don’t have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don’t have to know about Aristotle and Plato to serve. You don’t have to know about Einstein’s theory of relativity or the law of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by Christ’s love.*”<sup>9</sup> Brothers and sisters, in humbly loving as Christ has loved us, servant leaders can do great and remarkable...more rare and more vital... things. Quite simply, they can eat banana peels – and leave changed lives in their wake.

“*Then he got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself.* <sup>5</sup> *Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet” Amen.*

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Greenleaf. “*Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* ( Mahwah, NJ:Paulist Press; 1977), 13-14.

<sup>9</sup> ML King, Jr. <https://travishellstrom.com/articles/be-great> (accessed 2-21-20)..