

Sunday Morning Message

April 5, 2020

Title – *Servant Leadership at a Social Distance*

Text – John 13

Congregational Reading – John 13:12 - 17

Introduction

[Read the Text]

The context of John 13 is in the Upper Room at the conclusion of the Last Supper. John's gospel does not include much information regarding the Last Supper, save that it mentions here in v. 2 that the Supper was now ended. So the Triumphal Entry had already taken place. The disciples were gathered together in the upper room and had enjoyed their last supper with the Lord before His crucifixion.

After this time in the Upper Room, Jesus will leave for the Garden of Gethsemane where He will pray, and at the conclusion of His prayer, will be arrested and led away first to the Jews, and then unto the Romans for crucifixion.

Our focus for this morning's message is in the midst of the week between the Triumphal Entry and the Resurrection; before the Crucifixion, but after the Last Supper. The scene is in the Upper Room; the characters include Jesus and only eleven of His twelve disciples as Judas had already left from the Supper to go to the religious leaders in order to betray his Lord.

At the conclusion of the Last Supper, Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, something that seemed very strange to His disciples at the time, and would have been seen as peculiar to us as it is not really our custom, nor is it really necessary in our time to wash other people's feet as we all wear shoes. However, in Bible days, people wore sandals without socks, and walked on dirty roads that were at best, dusty; but were more often than not, very muddy. People's feet got very dirty. So, it was not unusual for people to wash their feet upon entering into a home. A parent might wash the feet of her small child; or a wife, her husband's. In the home of somebody wealthy, it might even be customary for a servant to wash the feet of an invited guest. However, it would have been very unusual for the master to wash someone's feet. This was Peter's reaction in v. 6: "*Lord, dost thou wash my feet.*" We now know that what Jesus did, He did as an example to us (verses 14 – 16).

However, fast forward with me 2000 years to the spring of 2020. How preposterous would it be today to wash each other's feet in the midst of this COVID-19 pandemic. I believe it is physically impossible to wash one another's feet at a social distance of at least six feet. In this crazy time that we are living in, most of us would be scared to death to get close enough to a non-family member and wash their feet. And, truth be told, most of us would not want anybody coming that close to us in order to have our feet washed.

We are now living in a time when we are commanded by our leaders and admonished by health officials to keep a social distance. Yet, Jesus still commands us to be servant leaders. The

challenge to God's people today is how are we going to continue in servant leadership while maintaining a social distance.

I. **Foot Washing Is a Model Not a Mandate (vs. 14 – 16)**

We have no church ordinance to observe foot-washing ceremonies. Foot washing is not like the Lord's Supper or Baptism. By washing the disciple's feet, Jesus was giving us an example of how we are to serve one another.

- A. **There Was a Need** (The disciples feet were dirty.)
- B. **There Were The Necessities to Meet That Need** (The basin, the water, and the towel were all there – verses 4 – 5.)
- C. **There Was Negligence on the Part of the Disciples** (The supper was now over; they had been in the Upper Room for a while, and yet they all still had dirty feet.)

The disciples tended to compete with each other for leadership positions among the twelve. They all wanted to be served, rather than serve. That is human nature.

Jesus took it upon Himself to demonstrate servant leadership.

"And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth." (Luke 22:24-27)

See also Mark 9:33 – 37; Mark 10:35 - 45

"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." - (Philippians 2:3-8)

This passage of Scripture is not teaching us as disciples of Christ that we specifically should wash each other's feet, but it is teaching us that we are to be servants to each other, in any way that is necessary. Today, foot washing is simply not necessary in most cases. (Exceptions – health care, parents of small children, etc.)

II. **Servant Leadership is Still Mandated Through Other Models**

This is the challenge that we face today amid this COVID-19 pandemic. We are to find ways to safely serve one another, while at the same time maintaining safe social distancing.

Social Distancing, however, will not always be possible:

"When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed." (Matthew 8:1-3)

Jesus touched a leper. Some forms of Leprosy were very contagious, and it could easily be transmitted through touching. Yet, Jesus touched this leper.

By the way, it was God who initially instituted social distancing to keep from contracting diseases like leprosy (or COVID-19). The Book of Leviticus tells us that people who were known to have leprosy were commanded to remain away from other people (Leviticus 13:46).

But, if you are a doctor or a nurse, or in healthcare in general, you will not be able to social distance. You will have to come dangerously close to people who potentially have a fatal disease, just as Jesus did with the leper. Healthcare people are literally laying their lives on the line in this pandemic.

Illustrate – Sara and Joanna (and others) are ministering to COVID-19 patients at the hospital. They are at an extreme risk for getting the virus. They are risking their lives in order to serve, to help other people.

Illustrate – Pat Bridges has a friend in New York who is a doctor, and she just tested positive for the virus.

Many health care workers are sleeping in their garages or in campers outside of their homes, because they do not want to risk infecting their families.

However, most of us will not have to wash people's feet, or touch people physically, but we are still commanded to serve one another.

I have been inspired as, I am sure, you have at all of the reports of how people are finding ways to help each other during this pandemic.

People who have been laid off are volunteering their time delivering groceries and prescriptions to high-risk or sick people.

Bob Fenton has been travelling around our area delivering necessary items to people.

At times like this we see some of the best of humanity.

Conclusion

My challenge to you this morning is to find ways, safe ways, to serve one another, to help somebody, to wash somebody's feet at a social distance. (A phone call or text message; a note of encouragement; an act of kindness – Larry helped Miss Darla)

Think of something; pray about it. God will give you wisdom.

Get safely out of your bubble, and find a way to be a blessing to somebody; find a way to love somebody at a social distance. And don't forget to find ways to communicate the gospel.

