

John's Legacy: Did You Feel It?  
John 13:1-17

Let me open with some riddles:

Q. What do you call a chicken crossing the road?

A. Poultry in motion.

Q. What do you call a boomerang that doesn't work?

A. A stick.

Q. What do you call four bullfighters in quicksand?

A. Quatro sinko.

Q. What do you call cheese that isn't yours?

A. Nacho cheese.

Q. What do you call a man who falls into an upholstery machine?

A. Fully recovered.

Q. What do you call a Christian who  
isn't serving?

A. A contradiction.

You see, friends, what we discover throughout the New Testament, is that when Christ calls us to be a part of His family, implicit in that call, is a call to serve Him. As I was preparing for this message, I read a statistic that says there are over 2,500 verses in the Bible that deal with the issue of helping the poor, the sick, the hungry. I didn't try to count them and verify that number. But it is clear that God set it up that we are to address this issue and that he works through us. His Plan B? Well, He never gave us a Plan B is. Plan A is the way he set it up.

Another interesting thing about this passage is that as near as both Jim and I can recall, this is the only passage in John's Gospel where Jesus touches the disciples. Sure there are several places where we see that He touched this Apostle or that one. But here is the only place where He touched all of them in one sitting. So it is a very powerful and clear sign of redemption and sending forth to serve.

There are two elements in our text that I want us to think about today: service and mission. Now, I realize that they may sound like the same thing. But I want to share about what it takes to be a good servant and then how to do service to others – mission.

In verses 4 and 5 of our text this morning, we see Jesus taking on the role of the menial servant of His day. It was customary for the host to provide a slave at the door to wash the feet of guests when they came to visit. After all, the roads were dusty and dirty, often muddy and gooey, and visitor's feet could be pretty disgusting. A slave had no choice but to wash the crud and mud and dirt from people's feet. Apparently, when the disciples arrived for their Passover meal with Jesus, there was no slave to wash their feet. And, apparently, the disciples felt it beneath them to serve one another in that way.

We can only imagine the astonishment of the twelve when Jesus Himself got up and took on the role of the slave. Imagine being Peter and watching Jesus wash the others' feet, all the while

moving closer to you. Seeing his Master behave like a slave must have confused Peter. He still did not understand Jesus' teaching that to be a leader, a person must be a servant. This is not a comfortable passage for leaders who find it hard to serve those beneath them. It makes us think: How do we treat those who work under us (whether children, employees, or volunteers)?

You see, friends, the true servant of Jesus is not the one who boasts of his accomplishments. Nor is it the one who goes about seeking others to lift her on their shoulders so everyone can see what they have done. The true servant of Jesus is the one who goes about quietly and consistently doing whatever it is they feel God has called them to do. Gordon MacDonald has said, "You can tell whether you are becoming a servant by how you act when people treat you like one."

One of the interesting things about John's narrative here is that he doesn't talk about the dynamics going on under the surface among these twelve men. If we read the accounts in the Synoptic Gospels, we learn that there had been a bit of discussion going on among them about which one would be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. We are even told that the mother of James and John, the son's of Zebedee, came and specifically asked for her sons to sit on Jesus' right and left hands in the Kingdom. Jesus puts an end to all that self-promotion by showing and telling the men to be servants, even slaves.

You see, self-promotion is antithetical to being a servant of God. I always struggle when people come to me at the door after a worship service and tell me it was "a wonderful sermon." Sure it strokes my ego, but it also embarrasses me. I try to point out that I believe God gave me the words to say.

So, the first thing to do when you prepare to serve God is think about your motives. Ask: Why am I serving God? Is it because I want folks to give me praise, and point out my work to others? Is it because I think I am so good at my service that I want others to see my example and be motivated? Is it because I am trying to earn the best room in God's Mansion?

Timothy Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York, writes: "Pastors often hear, 'I work my fingers to the bone in this church, and what thanks do I get?' Is that the way it is? Your service was for thanks? Are you in your right mind? Servanthood begins where gratitude and applause ends."

A second point to remember about serving is that we can expect difficulty. Friends, it ain't going to be easy. Maybe you have participated in a foot-washing service at a church sometime. Sure it can be meaningful and show real forgiveness and touch people's lives. But that kind of ceremony is nothing compared to washing the dirt and grime and, yes, even manure, off the filthy feet of a first century traveler. Let's face it, all of the original twelve Apostles, except John, died awful, often early deaths for their service to God. And John lived out the last part of his life in exile.

The third thing to remember about service is we are to put others first. As we review the Gospel accounts of the disciples' bickering about who is the most important among them, we see where they become indignant with one another. It easy to see a fault in someone else that we can't recognize in ourselves, isn't it? As someone has written, "Selfishness always results in

dissension. When we think only of ourselves, community breaks down and unity is replaced with division and backbiting. That's why one of the best things we can do as a church is to serve together. A church that serves together stays together."

Just for starters, here are four contrasts from the Bible in our outlook towards others:

- To gain your life, you must lose it (Matthew 16:25)
- To experience eternal life, you must have the faith of a child (Matthew 18:3)
- To receive, you must first give (Matthew 19:21)
- To be great, you must be a servant (Matthew 20:26)

One final point about service. Follow the example of Jesus! In Matthew's Gospel, we read these words from Jesus: "Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (20:26-28)

The Apostle Paul summed it up very well in writing to the Philippians: "Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross." (2:3-8)

You see, Jesus' example showed us that we have to get close enough to get our hands dirty. We can't serve from a distance. We have to touch people, clean their wounds, listen to their pain, show them that we truly care and are not just saying it. Jesus' example in washing the disciple's feet touched Peter in a powerful way. Peter wrote this, using the imagery of Jesus washing the feet of those who thought they were special: "All of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'" (1 Peter 5:5)

The late, great John Stott put it this way: "Greatness in the kingdom of God is measured in terms of obedience."

Service, of course, can be equated with mission. All too often, it seems, we think of mission as going to some foreign land, or at least another state and serving among poor people. But mission is really taking the Good News of the love and forgiveness of Jesus to those who may not have heard it or those who may have heard it, but not understood it fully.

Hugh Halter, co-author of *The Tangible Kingdom*, shares a moment that changed the way he approaches unbelievers. Halter wrote: Two weeks after 9/11, I was in Queens, New York, training church planters. Every night I walked down to a local Irish Pub to eat dinner with some friends. A waitress named Fiona not only served us well, but seemed curious about our faith and what we were teaching pastors. Each evening our conversation deepened. "So, why would you help pastors lead their churches if churches really don't do much good?" she asked.

Knowing that one-third of her Irish friends in the 1980s and 1990s were sexually abused in the Catholic school system, and that two of her friends were killed in “Protestant/Catholic” fights, gave me ample reason not to judge her criticism of organized religion. What could I say? How could I explain my love for Jesus without bringing the church into it?

I simply talked with her about the Kingdom. “Fiona, Jesus came to offer an alternative way of life from all the exclusive, religious, sectarian, and sinful ways people live. He called it the Kingdom, and it was huge for people back in the day and also for anyone looking for the real God.” “I’ve never heard about the Kingdom,” she said. “Tell me more.”

My final night in town, as I came in to say goodbye before flying back to Oregon, I heard Fiona yell over a crowded room, “That’s the guy I was telling you about! You’ve got to hear how he talks about God!” As the bar room split and she called her friends over, she looked at me and said, “Tell them what you told me—you know, all that stuff about the Kingdom!”

That night everything changed for me. I started an entirely new spiritual journey that pulled me out of my jaded, consumeristic Christianity. What happened next? We simply grabbed a few friends and started a community that was committed to living out and inviting others into Kingdom ways of life. Before we knew it, a church was started without us even trying.

Dot Chapman reported last Monday to the Evangelism Committee about her recent attendance at an ALPHA conference. One of the suggestions she picked up was to just go hang out at Starbucks and visit with some of the people there – especially those who seem to be distancing themselves from society. That’s a good opening to just talk about the Kingdom. You see, you don’t have to go far to do mission, you just have to be available to God and listen to His call, His prompting.

The implication of our text today is that in order to do mission for God, you first have to be touched by Him. Jesus touched each of the twelve, then said to them, “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” He touched them and sent them forth to serve others. His touch prepares us to go and serve. To fail to serve is to be disobedient.

So, let me close with the title of my message: Did you feel that? Did you feel the touch of God? If so, then go forth and serve Him. Serve without expecting any recognition from others, serve expecting that it might be difficult. But remember the saying, If God brings you to it, He will bring you through it. Make sure your service is to help others, not to bolster your own pride or inflate your ego. Serve, even if it means getting your hands dirty.

Serving Jesus is the only thing that will bring complete joy to your life. Albert Schweitzer wrote: “One thing I know: The only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve.”

In the last verse of our text today, Jesus said, “Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” (Vs. 17)