

The God Who Washes Our Feet

I have been doing a series called “A Church That Works” which, in part, I am doing in order to encourage each one of you who is involved in or who considers themselves to be part of the Columbus Vineyard Christian Fellowship family to get meaningfully involved in some activity of service here. It is appropriate that as a family to ask each of the family members to contribute to the needs and care of the family.

Let me begin today by telling a little story that comes from a Brazilian writer. He writes about a poor man who lived in the slums of Rio de Janeiro. The slums in Rio are called favelas. Above the city of Rio de Janeiro is a colossal statue of Christ. It towers above Rio. It is called the Christ of Corcovado. Now in this story, this poor man from one of the favelas of Rio climbed up 2500 feet to the colossal statue of Christ and he speaks to the statue and says, “I have climbed up to you, Jesus Christ, from the most filthy, most disgusting little shack down there to put before you, most respectfully, these concerns. There are 900,000 of us down there in the slums of that splendid city. And you, Christ, why do you remain up here at Corcovado surrounded by divine glory? Go down there into the favelas. Go down there into the smoke and the stench and the filth. Come with me into the faveles and live with us down there. Don’t stay way up here. Live among us and give us a reason to believe in you. Amen, God the Father.”

Last week I spoke of serving out of a place of health, a place of acceptance, a place in which we have had our core identity secured by Christ’s love. Last week we looked at the prelude of the story of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet.

Well, this week we are going to look at the actual account of Christ washing his disciples' feet because in it I think we find the most wonderful answer to the prayer of that poor Brazilian man. Christ, when are you going to come down? When are you going to step off of the mountain and get down in the filth and the dirt, in the suffering of this world? In this story, in this most wonderful historical account from the life of Christ, we read of Jesus not only getting down into the filth and dirt of this world, but also actually taking that filth and dirt upon himself. Taking our dirt and putting it on his towel.

This morning I have called my message very simply, "The God Who Washes Our Feet." Let's pray.

John 13:1-12

"It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 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.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?'

Jesus replied, 'You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.'

'No,' said Peter, 'you shall never wash my feet.'

Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no part of me.'

'Then, Lord,' Simon Peter replied, 'not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well.'

Jesus answered, 'A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.' For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

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."

This account of Jesus washing his disciples' feet is one of those stories that separates people. It draws a sharp line of division through the human race because it is an account that on the one hand repels many away from Christianity, away from the Christian message. And it is an account on the other hand that draws many and attracts. It exerts magnetic force. It is certainly a story that repels many.

I have spoken to you before about the question posed to Pope John Paul II in his book, *On the Threshold of Hope*. In the book the Pope answers a series of questions that were propounded to him by people all over the world. One of the questions that the Pope was asked is "If God is real, why doesn't he show himself more often?" If God really exists, why doesn't he reveal himself? It is a question that some of you might have had at one time or other in your life. Maybe you have it today. Maybe you have come to church and you are struggling with doubts. How can I believe this Christian faith, these biblical stories that were written so many centuries ago? If God exists why doesn't he show himself more clearly?

The Pope said in answer, "Well, let me translate your questions, if I might. Because what you are really asking is if God exists, why doesn't he get down to our level?" As that poor Brazilian man asked, "Why don't you come off that mountain where you stand above the city of Rio so clean, so untouched, so unfazed. Why don't you get down here with us?" The Pope said, "What you are really asking is why God, don't you stoop down to our level?"

And then he added this. “You know the problem that people have with God is not that God doesn’t stoop down to our level, but the fact that he does stoop down to our level – and even gets below us to hang naked and bloody on a cross.” Or as this story speaks of, God takes up the position of a servant and washes our feet.

See, what offends people around the world, especially Muslims and Jews, is the message that God would actually come to our level. That he would take on human flesh and walk in this dirty world and allow himself to be jostled in a crowd and pushed. Being hungry and tired and beaten and spit at. Many, many people say, “This kind of God we will not believe in. A God who remains above us, that is what we want. But a God who gets down at our level? Or even goes below us to serve us? No way.”

The great German philosopher, Friederick Nietzsche, whose philosophy became the basis of Nazism and what Adolph Hitler taught, poured scorn on Christianity in a book called *The Anti-Christ* that he wrote in 1895. Near the beginning of his book, he defined the good as “the will to power” and the bad as “all that proceeds from weakness and servanthood.” He said that happiness was a feeling that comes when power increases. While the worse possible vice imaginable is sympathy for the weak and the sick, which he scornfully said was what Christianity was all about. He praised Darwin and his emphasis on the survival of the fittest. He dreamt one day of the emergence of a super man, a daring ruler or race that would replace Christian people who always take the side of everything weak, base and low. He reserved his most bitter word for the Christian God, who he called “God of the Sick.” God of the Suffering. Christ is God hanging on a cross.

This story of Jesus taking off his outer garment and wrapping himself in a towel, which was the work of servants and slaves in ancient Palestine, is a story that on the one hand repels many people away from Christianity – God becoming a servant; God taking a lower

place. But to others, including me, it is one of the stories in the Bible that most attracts me to Jesus Christ. It is one of the stories that makes me love Jesus more, because it tells me that God doesn't stand way above me out there, unaffected by this world and all of its wackiness and brokenness. See, friends, for me the bottom line of my faith is that God is with us. God is not standing simply above us like that big statue of Christ at Corcavado, but that God is down here with us in our suffering, struggling, in our weakness, our doubts.

Maybe the most profound story I ever read of God's identification with us is in Elie Weisel's autobiographical account of his family and his community being dragged off to the Nazi concentration camp of Auschwitz. On his arrival at Auschwitz the men and women were segregated. Elie Weisel was a teenager at the time and never saw his mother and sister again. He says in his book called, *Night*, "Never shall I forget that first night in camp which has turned my life into one long night seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke of the crematoriums. Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my fate forever. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust."

He said, "Some spoke of God and of his mysterious ways; of the sins of the Jewish people, their future deliverance. But I ceased to pray."

Maybe the most horrifying experience of all was when the guards first tortured and then hung a little boy, who Elie Weisel calls "a child with a refined and beautiful face, a sad-eyed angel." Just before the hanging someone whispered behind Elie, "Where is God now? Where is God now?" Thousands of prisoners were forced to watch the hanging and then to stare at that little boy in the face. Elie said something within him kept saying over and over again, "There is God, hanging there on the gallows. There is God." Elie Wiesel never understood how true that voice inside him spoke.

You know what Elie Weisel heard that day as he looked at that boy hanging on the gallows is the essence of Christianity. It is what draws me as a Jewish person to Christ. As we look into that little boy's face hanging there in a concentration camp, we say, "This is exactly what my God did when he stooped down. There is God with us, identifying with us in every event of our lives."

See, friends, if Jesus was God then that changes everything about the way that you think about your problems or the problems of this world or the pain and difficulty that you might have gone through or may be going through now or will go through in the future. If Jesus was God, then God is with us in the midst of all of our garbage. Part of the lesson in this story is Jesus was required to wash his disciples' feet as another in a series of humiliations heading up to his final humiliation, his humiliation at the cross. Jesus' sufferings did not begin at the cross. They didn't even begin the night before when he was beaten. From the moment Christ was conceived in the womb of a virgin, to the moment when he entrusted his Spirit to God the Father and breathed his last, Jesus suffered to earn salvation for his people. Washing his disciples' feet was just part of his suffering, part of his humiliation. Part of the way that God gets down there with us.

Is this your faith? That God is with you in every crummy, ugly thing of your life? Is this your faith, that God is not only with you, but even would stoop down below you to wash your feet? Or is your God still up on the mountain, untouched and unmoved like the gigantic statues of Buddha, whose eyes are closed while he is meditating – unfeeling, uncaring, indifferent.

Think about this with me. What can you go through that Jesus, himself, did not endure and that his Spirit in us can not sympathize with? You have major financial problems?

“God with us” lived in poverty. He said, “Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.” He was homeless.

Have you experienced any kind of betrayal by someone close to you? By a trusted friend? Jesus understands that.

Do you experience painful loneliness maybe through involuntary singleness, or some other situation that cuts you off? God is with us in our loneliness.

Have you been falsely accused of something? Have you had your words twisted? God is with us there.

Has the government harassed you? Someone in the congregation just gave me a letter of profound harassment and unjust treatment by the internal revenue – just as we have been hearing with the congressional hearings on the IRS. A powerful government agency that can abuse people. One of our dear couples in the church experienced extraordinary abuse at the hands of the government. So did Jesus.

You have profound physical pain in your body? Searing pain that at times makes you want to die? So did Jesus.

You experience radical temptation? Is that what just wears you out – the fact that temptation in some area or other is staring you in the face? You are forced to repeatedly say, “No” and your spirit gets tired? So did Jesus.

Family problems? Problems with religious leaders? The loss of loved ones? God is with us and himself experienced that.

Never let your difficulties be a wedge between you and God. I would encourage you, no matter what you are going through today, or what you are going to go through in the future, I would encourage you to allow this story of God taking on human flesh and bending down to wash your feet as a servant to draw you into great faith and great love for God. To

communicate to you that, “Wait a minute. My God is not far away. I am walking through this with Christ. This pain, this problem is actually connecting me more intimately with Christ in his sufferings.”

God is not just with us when we are standing tall like Clint Eastwood or John Wayne. When we get our Ph.D. or our big bonus. Or when we cash in on our stock options. In fact, according to the bible, God is maybe with us more when we are bent down. He picks a slave people in Israel. He picks the no-accounts in the New Testament. He stoops down and washes the dirty feet of the disciples. This story is part and parcel of Christ’s suffering.

And the story is a symbol of his salvation. Now, I want you to put a finger in Philippians 2 because the movement in this historical account of John 13 is paralleled by the movement of the theological account in Philippians 2. So, if you can find Philippians 2 and stick your finger in there, I want to show you this wonderful parallel. We all could better appreciate what Christ has done for us in coming not only to suffer with us, but coming to save us. It says in John 13, “Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God.” Now, look at this. Verse 4, “So he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.”

In Philippians 2 it says, “Jesus, who, being in very nature God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing.” Just as in John 13 he gets up from the table and takes off his outer garments, so in Philippians 2 Jesus gets up from the right hand of God and strips off his divine attributes and takes a towel and wraps it around his waist. After that he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with a towel.

In Philippians 2, it says that he took “the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in the appearance of a man, he humbled himself.” And when Jesus finished in John 13:12 it says, “He put on his clothes and returned to his place.” In other words, he went back to the place where he started from.

And so in Philippians 2:9 it says, “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name which is above every name.” And finally, Jesus says in John 13:13, “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am.” Philippians 2 says, “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”

There is this incredibly beautiful parallel between this historical event in John 13 of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet and Paul’s theological reflection on the life of Christ. And perhaps, I don’t know this for fact, but perhaps this event formed the basis for the apostle Paul’s deep meditation on what the coming of Christ was all about. See this washing of the disciples’ feet is really a symbol of Christian salvation.

As I said, this washing of the disciples’ feet is a picture of salvation. Why does Jesus portray salvation through washing? And what is the meaning of vv. 8-11 where Jesus says, “‘Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.’ ‘Then, Lord,’ Simon Peter replied, ‘not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well.’ Jesus answered, ‘A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.’ For he knew who was going to betray him, and that is why he said that not every one was clean.”

Why this issue of washing? Because every one of us has a dirty stain on our souls called sin that needs to be cleaned away if we are ever to have a relationship with Holy God. Every one of us has a dirty stain on our soul. That stain separates us from God. There is, inside of

all of us, a dark side that no matter how bright and cheery and nice someone is outwardly, inside there is something in all of us that is really dark.

About a century ago, Robert Louis Stevenson wrote *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in which he explored the dark side of an otherwise nice and unassuming man. Mark Twain once said that every person is like a moon. They have a dark side which they don't show to anyone else. There is this savage like Mr. Hyde living inside of people – a secret sin area that is not disclosed. Maybe we even keep it hidden from ourselves.

You know, this story speaks of Judas not being clean. I don't know what comes to your mind when you think of Judas, but I doubt that he was a shady, shifty-eyed person. I doubt he was like the portraits that so many artists have painted – this dark figure looking off to the side. If he were like that all the disciples immediately would have known as they sat around that table and Jesus announced that someone was going to betray him. All of the disciples would have immediately said, "Well, we know who it is. The shifty-eyed guy. The one who is always sneaking around, Judas."

I doubt Judas was like that. I think it was more probable that he was a really likeable, fun guy with a big laugh, maybe a back slapper. Mr. Social. Mr. Glib. My Everybody's Pal. Why didn't anyone suspect Judas? Because his dark side was hidden from everyone other than Jesus.

When Rembrandt did his painting of Judas, the interesting thing was that instead of painting in some horrible nasty looking individual, or even one of his enemies the way that da Vinci did – da Vinci, the humanist, painted Judas as one of his enemies, a person who da Vinci hated – but when Rembrandt, the Christian, painted Judas, he painted his own face. And what Rembrandt, the Christian, was saying was that this dark stain, the sin, the treachery that was in Judas' soul was not just something that I see in one of my enemies.

This dark stain that was in Judas' soul is not just something that is out there somewhere with mean people. I see the same dirt in me. Do you? If you were painting Judas, would you paint someone you dislike, or yourself?

Understand that Jesus' discussion of washing and the actual washing of the disciples' feet is pointing to a deeper spiritual truth – the need for each one of us to be washed by God in order to be saved. Salvation is not a matter of going to church. It is not a matter of being a good person. Salvation is a matter of God washing away your sins. Note Jesus said in v. 8, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” Unless Jesus washes you, you are not saved. It is just that simple. No matter what you do, unless Jesus washes you, you are not saved.

Now, I want to teach you a little doctrine here. You can tell that Americans don't like doctrine anymore. We just want what is practical. Tell us what works. See, Christianity is not true because it works for us. Christianity works because it is true. Because underneath all the practical applications, there is core truth. Christianity describes the way that you truly can have a relationship with God. Christianity describes the way the world really is. It is not a way, it is this way. If you want to get connected with God, you must be washed. You have to have this dirty stain in you washed away.

Now, this little dialogue between Jesus and Peter in which Jesus says to Peter, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”

“Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet, but my hands and head as well.”

Jesus answered, “A person who has a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean.”

In this dialogue, Jesus is contrasting taking a bath in which our whole body becomes clean and simply having our feet washed. A whole person bath on the one hand, and having your feet washed on the other.

Now, the deeper spiritual significance of a whole body bath would be as a pointer to justification. And the deeper spiritual significance of having your feet washed is as a pointer to sanctification. Let me define those terms for you. Justification is not simply something you do with the right hand margin of your memos or letters on a word processor. Justification is God's declaration pronounced over the lives of those who place their faith in Jesus that they are not guilty in his sight. Justification is the declaration of God that the person who believes in his Son, Jesus, is accounted righteous and therefore saved from the penalty due us for our sins. Justification is that whole person bath. The moment you trust Jesus, his suffering, his merit, his goodness, his life, his death, his resurrection, as the payment for your sin and the dark stain within you, the moment you trust Jesus and all that he is as the only way you are ever going to get right with God, at that moment God declares you to be clean. He says, "I will not penalize you for that dirty spot, for that dark side. I pardon you. I let you go. I declare you 'not guilty.'" Freed from the penalty of our sin. Happy Day! Judged by God to be not guilty in his sight. Happy Day! Sins placed upon our sin-bearer, Jesus. Happy Day! All of it through the bath that is called justification.

But what will actually scrub me inside so that I am not only declared clean, or viewed as clean, or judged clean, but actually made clean? Sanctification. That foot washing that Jesus performs. See, justification saves us from the penalty of sin. But sanctification saves us from the power and the presence of sin. Justification is God's judicial declaration that we are clean. But sanctification is actually my experience of being made innocent and clean. Justification happens in an instant – the moment we believe, a pardon we receive. But sanctification is a continual process. Day by day, we need to get our feet washed. Day after day, we go before Jesus and confess our present sins and get our present sins cleansed.

Yeah, I got that whole person bath. You don't have to be saved and resaved and resaved. But daily you need to be washed and experience inside cleansing for your soul. See, justification describes the beginning point of faith. It is what happens when you first come to Christ. Sanctification speaks to us about the life of faith. It doesn't happen all at once. We want it to. We want that stain inside to be washed away completely. That happens over the course of our lives and it will never be fully completed until we are glorified before God and we have our new resurrection bodies. See, we want sanctification to work like justification. We want it to be instant. Instantly, God, free me from this dark polluting spot that bothers me. But it is a little bit at a time, a little bit at a time.

Sanctification is the working out of our life with Christ. In justification we are just passive. We simply receive the pardon through mere trust in Christ alone. In sanctification we are active. We are getting cleaned up by applying the cleansing soap of Christ to our souls.

But you know, his cleansing needs to be applied and active. It doesn't mean that we clean ourselves up. It means that we actively apply Christ's power to our stains. We get his word in our minds so that our minds get transferred. But we also have to read his word. We pray for his power to overcome this incident, but we actually have to pray. We look at Jesus. We meditate upon him in worship. And that transforms us. We confess our sins to one another and receive prayer and accountability. We fellowship with each other. We engage in times of fasting and quietness before God.

Justification is rest. Sanctification is a fight. The Christian life lived out is a struggle. It is a wrestling match. Justification is Christ for us. Sanctification is Christ in us.

What do I mean Christ for us? I mean Christ doing for us in our place what we couldn't do for ourselves.

There is a story of a philosophy class with a professor who gave impossible exams. He told the students in his philosophy class, “Whatever you can put down on an 8½ x 11 sheet of paper, you can bring into the exam as a help in this Philosophy class.” Students in the class busily began filling an 8½ x 11 sheet of paper in microscopic size print, basically copied the text onto these sheets of paper. One student walked into the class and put a blank 8½ x 11 sheet of paper down on the floor and had a philosophy Ph.D. stand on the paper whispering the answers to the exam in his ear.

The students who tried to take the exam on their own by filling out their 8½ x 11 sheet with their own answers failed. The student who got the help from another got an A. That is justification. Someone doing for us what we can’t do for ourselves. Sanctification is Christ doing in us, changing us, cleaning us, daily washing our feet from the grime that we pick up in this dirty world and our bad choices, our wrestling with the evil one. This foot washing speaks of a deeper significance. It is a picture of Christ’s salvation.

And the foot washing is an example for our service. What was the problem with Peter’s attitude in v. 8 when Peter said, “No, you shall never wash my feet.” It is very strong in the Greek. It is actually a triple negative. It is “No, not never.” We can’t say that in English. But you know, “No, not never” speaks to us of the kind of attitude that is the very opposite that of a servant. An attitude which offends God perhaps more than anything else that is in our hearts. “No, not never” is all about our self-sufficiency, our unwillingness to receive help when we need help.

Think about this with me. What is it that keeps people from getting saved? Is it the dark stain in their souls? No, I already told you that Jesus will wash away the stain in our souls, the thing that separates us from God. Is it some secret sin? No, that can be washed away. The only thing that will keep a person from being saved is their unwillingness to be

washed by Christ. The attitude of self-sufficiency where someone looks at God and says, “No, not never. You shall never wash me. I am doing fine, just as I am. I am OK. I have no stain. There is nothing dirty in me.”

Friends, I regularly explain to people the way to be saved. Occasionally, I will see someone begin to grasp the idea that God, in love, came down to give us baths and wash our dirty feet. And then I will say to the person, “Do you want to be washed by God today? Do you want to have the stain inside of you, your dark side, cleaned away?” And unfortunately, there are those folks who bar the door at that point and say, “No, not ever. No.” This pride rises up in a person. I am a good person. I am a good mom and I try to be good all the time. I don’t need to be washed. I don’t need anything cleaned up in me. This story is meant to communicate something of the servant’s heart. Jesus is looking for people who can receive.

First of all, of course, servants are people who can receive spiritually. Receive salvation. Jesus is looking for people who can receive personally. Some of the proudest people on earth are the self-sufficient who can’t receive help when they need help. How many of us have elderly relatives who will work themselves to the bone and wear themselves out physically, but oh no, you aren’t going to help me clean the storm windows and put them in before winter. Dad and I will just drag them up from the basement. You are not going to help me mow my grass, or clean my gutters.

See, before we think of a servant doing something, you have to see that a servant is someone who can receive. It is hard for proud self-sufficient Americans to receive. But if you can’t receive, you are cut off from God. It breaks my heart to watch couples in this church drift farther and farther away from each other arguing continually or just living in a state of absolute coldness and not going for help. Friends, why do you do that? Because

you don't have the heart of a servant. Servants are people who can receive help when help is needed.

I want to talk to you husbands. I am not saying this is the case in your particular marriage, I am saying that as a general rule, husbands in general, tend to be self-sufficient and proud and find it difficult to admit to a counselor or to a pastor that their marriage is not doing well and it may need help. In my experience, wives are often quicker to say, "Let's get some help here." The men are fighting and dragging their feet. No one is going to find out about what I am doing. I am not going to sit there and get criticized, as if that is what counseling is all about. Servants are people who will stoop down to receive help when it's needed.

Whether it is you, wife, who is standing on your pride, or you, husband, Jesus hates the attitude of self-sufficiency that keeps you from getting the assistance that you need when you need it. And we have all kinds of programs here to help people. We have marital peer counseling. If you want to get together with a couple and get some assistance, we can sign you up to meet with a couple. Or sign you up for individual help and counseling with a trained peer counselor. We have professional counselors for issues that go beyond what lay people can handle.

But it doesn't matter how many programs we have. If you are unwilling to admit a need, if you won't seek help, then help might as well not exist.

And of course, the same lesson applies to child raising. We struggle as parents with our kids. We hit the wall. But parents can be some of the most proud people in the world. It embarrasses us to admit any failure or flaw. Parents will watch their kids drift farther and farther away from themselves, farther and farther away from Christ. They watch Satan literally take their kids by the hand and walk them away from the Kingdom without raising

the white flag and saying, “Help. I will pay what it takes. I will take the time. I will humble myself, and if something needs to be corrected in me as a parent, I will do it. But I am not going to watch my kid just slide into decline and failure.”

Servants receive. Servants receive. Turn to your neighbor and say that. Servants receive.

I talk with people in the church who say that they are burned out. Why are we burned out? Could it be because we have taken a self-sufficient attitude and said regarding ourselves, “We don’t need to receive?” How many leaders control every single aspect of a ministry? Run themselves ragged and then complain about being tired because they are unwilling to delegate responsibility or get any help?

I will tell a story on me and Marlene. Not too many years ago Marlene and I used to lead a small group, what we call kinship groups here at the Vineyard. We would have 35 people over to our house every week. Marlene and I would clean up before the meeting. I would run down in the basement and carry up all the chairs. She would be making coffee and baking before the meeting to have food ready for the 35 folks who would come over. I would prepare the Bible study. People would troop in and dirty up the house. Eat our food. We would pray for everyone. Marlene would lead the time of worship. After, everyone would traipse on out and we would clean up until about 11:30 at night.

Week after week, we were exhausted. And then it dawned on me. What gives us the right to control every aspect of ministry so tightly that none of these folks get the opportunity to serve or to grow through service? We were treating them like little babies. Servants receive.

And if you are tired in your particular ministry or your area of service, perhaps it is because you are controlling everything. Perhaps it is that you don’t receive prayer regularly.

How often is it, leader, where you turn to the group and say, “I need prayer. I am not going to just pray for all of you, but I need prayer tonight. I need to be brought before God and have God’s presence renewed in my life. I need Christ with me in this current difficulty that I am experiencing.” Servants receive.

And in any area if you are saying, “No, not never, I am enough” to that extent you are cutting yourself off from God and God’s assistance, God’s Spirit.

Servants not only receive, but finally, servants “do.” Jesus said in v. 13, “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do [And you can underline the word “do” in your bible] as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them [and you can underline that word “do” in v. 17].” Servants receive and servants do.

Now, I want you to see what Jesus didn’t say. In v. 15 he didn’t say, “I have given you an example so that you can hear about serving at church.” He didn’t say, “I have given you an example so that you can form a discussion group and talk about serving.” He didn’t say, “I have given you an example so you can lobby the government to hire more people to do.” He didn’t say, “I have given you an example so that you can write to the pastor and try to twist their arms so that the pastors will do.”

He said, “I have set you an example so that you should do as I have done.”

Servants receive. Servants do.

Servants do. Don’t wait. So many people don’t do what needs to be done when it needs to be done because they are waiting. They are waiting for this great emotion to seize them.

Call me crazy, but I just can't imagine Jesus having this incredible emotional rush as he looked at the dirty feet of his disciples. I don't think that Jesus looked at that need for service and said, "Whoa, I just can't think of anything I would rather do." I don't think he was seized with excitement at the prospect of washing Peter's feet. Sometimes he had an emotional rush. He was moved with compassion to heal. Or he was filled with sorrow or distress. But I think sometimes there is an obvious need and we are waiting around for an emotional rush.

Servants do, they don't wait. So often when we wait instead of do, we rationalize away the reasons we should do. The fact is that if you wait long enough, you will find a reason not to do.

"Well, I am sure that pot will get cleaned somehow."

"Why should I volunteer to help someone else move? Another person will do that."

"I am so busy. I have a family. I have needs."

Whenever we wait, our minds, which are rationalization factories, will come up with at least 10 good reasons why we shouldn't serve.

Servants do, they don't wait for the badge of adequacy to be handed them from heaven.

"I could never be involved in leading a group or praying for the sick. Who am I?"

"I need to be credentialed and I need 4000 hours of training."

We offer training here for virtually every ministry that we have. But who are you? You are someone who is loved by Jesus. Someone gifted by him. Don't let inadequacy keep you from serving.

A lot of people wait to be asked. If you are waiting to be asked here in the church before you serve, then listen up. I am asking. Anyone of you says, "Well, no one ever asked

me” listen up – I am asking. I am telling you through this series that our family, our community has needs and we need you. We need you to give some time.

Maybe to serve as a Big Brother for a single mom’s kids once a week or once every other week for an hour or two. Our men’s ministry is taking sign-ups for this very necessary ministry.

Maybe to work on the landscaping on the building out here.

Maybe to baby-sit at the church.

Maybe to teach a class.

Maybe to visit someone at the hospital.

Maybe to do some marital peer counseling with your mate for a couple or two who are struggling with their marriages?

Maybe to visit someone in the community who has AIDS?

Maybe to host a small group in your home.

If you are waiting around to be asked, here is your invitation. Servants do, they don’t wait.

Servants do, they don’t announce. I don’t think Jesus got up from the table and said, “You know, boys, I want you to watch this now. I think you need to have a lesson in servanthood. Watch me scrub Andrew’s feet. Here is the way it’s done.” That was the mark of the Pharisees. They were constantly announcing everything they were doing. Jesus just got up and did it. If there is a need, just meet it.

Friend, you don’t need a pat on the back or a thank you card for every act of service big or small. It breaks my heart when I hear a person complain in the church and say, “You know, I did this act of service and no one acknowledged it.”

Yeah, we need to encourage each other. We need to notice each other. Yeah, it would be nice if every time someone did something we wrote them a note to say thank you. But who are we doing this for anyway? Must we announce every one of our good deeds, like Ted Turner and get front-page publicity on every single newspaper about our gifts? Must we stand in front of TV cameras telling the world what we are doing for it, making sure it's on CNN every ten minutes? Or can we really enjoy the simple pleasure of allowing Jesus to work through us on behalf of someone else? The pleasure of watching another person helped. The joy of seeing a need met. The blessing of watching a person embrace Christ or grow in their faith or overcome a marital difficulty or break a habit. Servants do, they don't announce.

And servants do, they don't specialize. We live in a nation of specialists. You ask the average attorney in America about a simple courtroom procedure and they will shake their head and say, "I don't know anything about court. I have never been in court in my life. I handle tariff issues between my firm and a Venezuelan firm."

Everyone in America is a specialist. We have kick return specialists on football teams. They can't receive passes. They can't be running blocks. They don't know how to block. They don't even return punts. They just return kick offs.

There are rebounding specialists in basketball. Guys who can't dribble. They can't shoot. They play only adequate defense. But they are rebounding machines.

There are baseball players who only pitch in the middle innings. They can't start a game. They can't close a game. They may only be used against right handers.

Education is so specialized these days that people in the same department in a university can't even communicate with each other. They can't even evaluate each other's papers. And across departments? Forget it.

You know, Christian servants are the only generalists left in this country. See, I don't believe Jesus was a Savior Specialist, who walked around saying, "Sorry. I can't meet this need or that need. I have just come to save the world from sin." Jesus said he came as a servant. He says in Mark 10, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus was a generalist. And Christian servants are as well. They walk into situations and they say to themselves, "What is needed here?"

"This person needs help financially. How can I help or get them help?"

"This person needs help moving. How can I help or get them help?"

"This person needs counseling. How can I help or get them help?"

"This person needs Christ. How can I help or connect them with help?"

"They need healing prayer. They need someone to talk to."

See, these classes that we are offering – and I want to encourage you today to take out that form in your bulletins and sign up for the next Discovering Your Ministry class – but what I don't want to have happen is that after people discover their ministry that they become specialists in this church.

"Sorry, that doesn't involve teaching or intercessory prayer. Therefore, I don't do it."

What I think God wants to see is a church filled with people who really know how they are gifted. They have discovered their ministry and their place of anointing. But they go at life and church life with servant hearts saying, "Well, maybe this is outside of my gifting area, but I am going to reserve some time, money and effort just because the need is there, I will baby-sit."

"Maybe I am not the world's best cook, but just because the need is there I will go to KFC or McDonald's and pick up dinner." Which is what I do because I don't cook.

It was said of Jesus that he went around doing good. Acts 10. Wouldn't you like that on your gravestone?

"Here lies [and you have your name filled in]. She [or he] went around doing good."

The last thing servants do, they don't talk. Unfortunately in the church today, we have created a cultural talk. We have discussion groups on virtually every topic under the sun. We talk and talk and talk and talk. Imagine with me a President of a corporation who leaves for a lengthy overseas trip, but calls in his instructions every day to his staff. He faxes them and e-mails them.

After three months of being away, he comes back and discovers none of his instructions have been implemented. He gathers his staff together and says, "What is the matter with you? Didn't you receive my communication? Didn't you read my faxes? Didn't you read my e-mails or hear me on the phone?"

The staff says, "Oh, yes, we did, Boss. We did. In fact, we formed several discussion groups on your January 3rd e-mail. We studied it and we even memorized your Oct. 14th fax. We had a competition here and gave prizes to the person who could best recite your Oct. 14th fax. In fact, Joe over there won the prize in our fax drill context."

Do you think the boss might say, "The purpose of my communication to you was not so that you could study or discuss or even memorize what I was saying, but that you would *do* it."

Jesus has spoken to us. He has communicated to us. He has written to us. He continues to communicate to us today. He said, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." Servants do, they don't just talk.

Conclusion.