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Lent Day 38: The Washing

4-5 minutes

John 13:1-15 (ESV)

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

The NIV translates verse 1: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love." In this unexpected act of foot washing, Jesus was communicating something profound about the nature of divine love. Love is not simply what Jesus does, but love is who he is.

Often when we consider loving someone, we think in terms of actions and behaviors. We ask ourselves, "What's the loving thing to do?" But Jesus' unexpected, self-effacing act of service leads us to ask the antecedent question, "Who am I?" Without first asking this question, we can unknowingly place limits on our love because we are not operating out of a gospel-transformed identity. For example, if we functionally see ourselves as orphans needing to look out for ourselves instead of as God's beloved children, we will limit our generosity towards others out of fear of not having enough. Likewise, if we think we are righteous by our own hard work, there will be boundaries to the way we are willing to serve others because our pride keeps us from serving those who "aren't deserving."

When we look to Christ we find a beautiful freedom to serve others, arising from the security of his identity: "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a

servant ...” (Phil 2:6-7, NIV). Jesus was able to serve in a way that no one expected because he knew the Father’s love intimately. The same heart that led him to wash the disciples’ feet would lead him to the cross. Because of Christ we have the same privileged status and security with the Father, and so we become free to serve in the radical, loving ways in which he has served us.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I forget each day who I am in Christ and the grace that envelops my life. My love has limits because I don’t embrace the truth of who you have made me to be. Help me to live out the reality of being your beloved child so that my love for others flows out of this new identity. Let me be a bewildering servant to those around me as you dismantle the limits I have placed on my love. In Christ’s Name, Amen.

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