

Make Me a Servant
John 13: 1 – 17
May 30, 2010
Memorial Day Service

During the American Revolution, a man in civilian clothes rode past a group of soldiers repairing a small defensive barrier. Their leader was shouting instructions, but making no attempt to help. Asked by the rider why he was not helping, the man replied with great dignity, “Sir, I am a corporal!”

The stranger apologized for not recognizing his rank, dismounted, and proceeded to help the exhausted soldiers. He turned to the corporal and said, “Mr. Corporal, next time you have a job like this and not enough men to accomplish it, go to your commander-in-chief, and I will come and help you.” The man in civilian clothes was George Washington.

I believe most of us are drawn to leaders who haven’t been corrupted by power or position or title. There is something compelling about a leader who, while possessing power or position, or title, still is able to identify with the struggles and needs of those who serve under him.

Jesus is the ultimate example of this kind of leadership. In John Chapter 13, Verses 1 through 17, we are given the riveting story of how Jesus, on the eve of the greatest crisis and moment of His earthly ministry – His crucifixion – performed one of the most arresting object lessons of all time; He demonstrated how we ought to express love for others through acts of service. In this instance, the act of service was something usually relegated to a servant (actually slave is the better term): washing the feet of His guests.

Down through the centuries, this act by Jesus has been recognized as the ultimate act of service. Let’s read the text (read).

Our text gives a clear picture of what it means to serve. I am actually going to use Verses 1 to 3 specifically for my main points. I warn you, the points we can draw from it are pretty basic, which means they are easy to apply and hard to ignore.

Verse 1 -- Service is what we do while we still have time.

A. Jesus knew the time had come for Him to finish His mission on earth and return to the Father. He had less than 24 hours. And He knew it.

1. If they had clocks in the First Century, Jesus would have heard the ticking.
2. If they had wall calendars then, He would have turned over the last month.
3. He literally was about to have His last meal!

B. Ever thought about what you would do if you knew you had 24 hours left?

1. Mow the lawn? Clean the house, or organize the garage?

Or perhaps you might set out to leave things better than they are at present in your finances or important papers.

On September 11, 2001, Todd Beamer was faced with that same question. Except he had significantly less than 24 hours; he had minutes. According to the conversation he had with a GTE in-flight operator, Todd knew it, too.

Beamer was a 32 year old Oracle executive who was on United Flight 93 leaving Newark, New Jersey for California. Before boarding, he had called to check in on his friend and prayer partner, just to see how he was doing. Boarding was normal; but

shortly after takeoff, things went terribly wrong. Todd and other passengers realized the plane had been hijacked; furthermore, they were aware other planes on the east coast had been flown into the World Trade Center in New York.

Todd and others decide to do something about the situation. Although his wife, Lisa was at home, he called instead the GTE operator, reported the hijacking, and then asked her to recite the Lord's Prayer with him. The last thing the operator heard him say was "You guys ready? Let's roll."

On September 11, 2001, Todd Beamer became a hero to Americans and freedom lovers the world over. But Todd Beamer was a hero before he boarded Flight 93 that day. No, he wasn't a hero because of his athletic success in college, or his business success; he was a hero because of what he did with his time. He was a servant.

The guiding principle for all of us if we are going to become known as servants is that each day is potentially the last day we will be given in this life. So use your last day to serve.

C. Don't say, "I'll become a servant one when I have become financially secure, or when I have achieved my goals, or when the kids are grown." Because when all that happens, chances are likely you won't magically change into a person you haven't been all your life.

1. If you keep putting off becoming a servant, there will always one more reason to delay taking up your personal servant's towel.

2. You'll get to the end of your life having done all you set out to do, except serve.

Verse 1b & Verse 2 – Service is how we show our love here and now.

A. I find it interesting – even significant – that John tells us where Jesus loved His disciples: they were in the world!

1. Curious phrase; where else would John and James and Peter and the rest be? Why does John tell us that detail?

2. The only conclusion I can draw is that Jesus loved these men where they were in their lives, which means He loved them as they were, warts and all.

B. Too many Christians have an other-worldly view of life: you must be so hyper-spiritual you just ooze godliness or you don't measure up with them.

1. But to do that means someone has to manufacture something other than genuine feelings and conduct.

C. That reminds me of one of the most important principles of the Christian faith: **Love is not just an emotion; it is also an action.**

1. Love as an expression of identifying with Jesus as Lord and Master operates on the stage of everyday living. It's in the daily grind of living on this dirty planet.

2. The promptings of love – Christ-like love – don't come from some mysterious emotion, but from basic human needs.

3. People get dirty feet, and love washes them. People get sick and someone sends them a card, or sits with them, or performs a household chore to relieve their anxiety.

C. Love expresses itself not in grand gestures of heroic proportions, but in meial redering of humble service.

Verse 3 & Verse 4 – Service is the way we use our power.

A. We commonly think power is inherently a bad thing.

1. But in fact, power is a neutral commodity. And all of us possess power in our lives. It is there in varying degrees, but each of us has it.

2. Also, the Bible tells us we possess a unique power as Christians: the power to become the sons of God. That says to me I possess power that is uncommon, is eternal, and is supplied by Almighty God Himself!

B. The critical element in the reality of power for a Christian is in the way he chooses to use that power.

1. Senator John Stennis was looking forward to a quiet evening at home after a long session at the Capital. After parking his car, he approached his front door, but was interrupted by robbers, who shot him twice, leaving him grievously wounded. He was rushed to the hospital and immediately taken to surgery.

News of the situation reached another Senator, Mark Hatfield. He immediately drove to the hospital, and went inside to check on Stennis' condition. He noticed the switchboard operators were swamped with calls about the Senator. He spotted an unattended switchboard, sat down, and voluntarily went to work. He continued to take calls until the next morning.

Sometime the next day, he stood up, stretched, put on his overcoat, and spoke to another operator as he passed on his way to the door: "I'm Mark Hatfield. Happy to help out." Then Senator Mark Hatfield walked quietly out.

There seemed no way a liberal Democrat would ever give aid and comfort to a conservative Republican, let alone spend hours doing a menial, lowly task and be "happy to help out."

C. Jesus is the perfect model for what it means to have power, and to use that power to leave behind the fingerprints of faith.

1. God had put all things under His feet, so He got up and washed the dirty feet of His disciples.

2. We balk at the thought of selfless service precisely because we fear we will give away our power if we do so. If I am your servant, you are superior to me; therefore, you have power over me. You may take advantage of me; I become vulnerable.

3. C.S. Lewis talks about that very danger in *The Four Loves*: **C.S. Lewis: "To love at all is to be vulnerable... the only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from the dangers of love is Hell"**

D. We really have two choices: either live our lives attempting to control people, or live our lives in order to serve other people.

1. God never call us to control other people. That's His job. God calls us to serve.

Ironically, that's what God did when God lived on earth in the person of Jesus Christ. He served. And if God is ever going to use each of us as instruments of His power, He can only do it if we serve others.

The question isn't, "Am I ever going to get enough control?" The real question is, "Am I going to let God control me?"

Last week I had a conversation with one of our young members, Brandy Sandusky Patterson. She shared how she had become burdened with the thoughts of how she had

been so blessed when, as a young single mom, God had provided for her and here daughter in innumerable ways. Yet she was aware of many women in similar situations who were struggling in this economy and all the challenges of modern life.

After spending a sleepless night praying and reading Scripture, she was convinced she needed to start her own one-person support ministry to single parents. She wants to organize a group to respond to practical, every day needs of single parents, in essence to “wash their feet” in loving service. How about you?

What is God showing you that calls for you to respond in love to someone’s need by “washing their feet.”

Let’s pray!