

# “What Does It Mean To Be A Servant Of Christ?”

John 13:1-17

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March 1, 2009

## Washing Feet?

Jesus challenges us by getting down on his knees and washing his disciple's feet. That servant action is hard to imagine in our culture. But, in the Middle Eastern culture where only the lowest of the low in the servant caste would ever touch someone's feet, this Jesus encounter challenges everything!

- An honored Rabbi washing feet? Impossible!
- The Son of God washing feet? Unbelievable!
- The Word of God who created the world, washing feet? Unimaginable!

Yet, Jesus kneels with basin, towel, and water to wash his students feet. No wonder Peter is askance at Jesus' action. Put yourself in Peter's place and you can understand the reason Peter will not allow Jesus to wash his feet. The action is too strange! Yet, Jesus through his action is demonstrating his teaching. In the last days of his life, Jesus models the action Jesus expects from his disciples. After all, Jesus teaches during his three years with the disciples:

- ***“I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:27)***  
[www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=luke+22:27](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=luke+22:27)
- ***“So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers, lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:42-44)*** [www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=mark+10:42-44](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=mark+10:42-44)

In this foot washing action Jesus models for his disciples and for us the lifestyle that Jesus expects us to follow after he is resurrected into heaven.

I don't know about you, but I find this portion of Holy Scripture to be one that I would rather romanticize or spiritualize. I just have a hard time accepting the servant role! Especially the servant role of actually or symbolically washing feet! My ego gets in the way. My pride messes with my mind.

Yet, this Jesus encounter is real. I cannot deny that Jesus actually did wash feet and through his example challenge me, and you, to live as a servant following his example. I turn to the Apostle Paul for help with my ego centered, pride driven sinful life. He too had his problems. And, he wrote to the Galatian Christians who also had a problem with being servants and told them:

## **“Use your freedom to serve one another in love” (Galatians 5:13)**

[www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=galatians+5:13](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=galatians+5:13)

Service in love following the example of Jesus is a “Just Do It” action. Sister Helen Prejean in the movie, Dead Man Walking, stepped into a whirlwind of pain because her motive was more than normal human compassion. She heard Jesus' call to service and she did it. Her parents tried to stop her. Her students in the poor housing project rejected her. The chaplain of the prison belittled her. The prison warden tolerated her. The victim's families misunderstood and hated her. Matthew Poncelet, the convicted convict constantly lied to her. Any normal human being would walk out in a minute. But, a different kind of love motivated and energized Sister Helen. She was following the example of Jesus. Her avowed intention is stated in the movie, “I've never done this before. I'm just trying to follow the example of Jesus.”

Christ called her into action. Christ gave her the freedom to move beyond her self interest, her need to be appreciated, her sense of duty, and her desire to be accepted. Christ called her into a ministry for which she was unprepared. Christ called her to trust that each step of the way she would be strengthened and

supported. Christ's word of challenge comes to each one of us. "Use your freedom to serve one another in love!"

## What about our ego centered prideful selves?

Unfortunately, many of us get involved in activities for reasons that have little to do with Christ. So we begin with Holy Scripture that teaches us to assume that there is a part of every human psyche that is corrupted by self interest, self indulgence, and self righteousness. Paul warns against being a slave to your shadow side. The list of actions motivated by this ugly part of every human include: *repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community.*" (**Galatians 5:19-21**) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=galatians+5:19-21](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=galatians+5:19-21))

The Good News that Paul proclaims is a truth and power that will set each human being free from slavery to the shadow side of their psyche. Paul writes, "*You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become servants to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment. 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.*" (**Galatians 5:13-15 NRSV**) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=galatians+5:13-15](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=galatians+5:13-15)) Paul's understanding of Christian freedom is not license for doing anything we want. Rather, a Christian is freed by the grace of God to serve in the name and under the direction of Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus teaches us that:

- We are free to see and speak the truth in love.
- We are free to approach the throne of God and serve God in worship.
- We are free to build in this time and place a community of freedom and service through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Earlier in this letter Paul writes, "*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age,*" (**Galatians 1:3-4**). ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=galatians+1:3-4](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=galatians+1:3-4)) God's grace and love sets us free from the shadowed principalities and powers of this present evil age for loving service in the name of Jesus Christ. Since we all appreciate and desire freedom let us explore more carefully what service is and what it is not.

## Christ Centered Service is not Self Indulgent!

Being wise enough to know whether we are participating in service because of our shadowed needs or because Christ has asked us to requires that we pray and participate in a supportive, honest community of Christ followers. By ourselves, alone in with our own thoughts, we can fool ourselves into thinking that we are doing the right thing. But, when we share with our supportive group we see the reality of our shadow side that is motivating us.

Our mixed motivated hearts, our muddled minds, even our confusing language sets up this self indulgent confusion. For example:

- Have you noticed that we drive on parkways and park on driveways?
- When you send something by car, it's a shipment. Yet, when you send something by ship, it's called cargo.
- Someone will play at a recital and that same person will recite at a play.

We just confuse ourselves with language much less with mixed motives driven by strong emotions.

I remember my first opportunity to start in a high school basketball game. Our center tipped the ball to me. I caught the ball and drove down the court. I executed a perfect lay-up. Turning around to run back up the court, I noticed the other team's fans cheering. I still remember the sinking feeling in my stomach when I realized I had scored two points for the other team. I had executed everything right except being in the right court.

When we think of serving God in Christ's church our shadow sides can trick us. A young child attended Worship for the first time with his parents. After the Worship was over, his mother asked him what he thought of the experience? Much to the surprise of both parents he exclaimed his great joy at being allowed to be in Worship. Following up on the first question, his mother asked what the best part of the Worship was for him. He said he liked the offering best. "I got a quarter from the plate," he said. "How much did you get?"

Like this proverbial young child, we often serve God with the mixed motivation of taking care of ourselves rather than giving to God and others. God accepts all our service, but the Christ like, foot washing, service to God that desires of us is not done for ourselves! There are some common mixed motives that we can quickly explore. If you are serving Christ to:

- **Feel Good**

If we serve because we want to feel good, then we will quit when the going gets tough. Joy is a by product of service offered to God. But, if we are searching to be happy through service, then we will quickly find that such happiness is shallow. I thank God for people who serve God in the nursery. You have to be called to change so many diapers on Sunday morning!

- **Impress others,**

If we serve God because we want others to appreciate us, then we will stop doing the job when we are not admired. Doing something because you want and desire the praise of others places you on the fickle list of life time losers. The only true focus of service is God.

- **Out of duty.**

If we serve God out of a sense of duty or guilt, then we will burn out and run out before the job is done. Many of us are neurotic enough to think that every problem is our problem to solve; our over active guilt drives us to get involved in too much. Guilt and duty bound souls are not free to cherish God's abundant life.

## **Foot Washing Service Gives Glory to God!**

Service to God that lasts and builds a heavenly community is not motivated from the self indulgent part of us. If we are serving from this self centered part of ourselves then we will soon find ourselves doing exactly what Holy Scripture warns against with the image of a wild animal fight. Where each one is biting the other until both are dead. So check your service motives!

- If you find yourself upset because you are doing something and someone else is not, then you need to check your service motivation. In Christ, we are free from comparisons.
- If you find yourself overburdened and over tired from service to God, then you need to check your service motivation. In Christ, we are free from guilt and duty.
- If you find yourself identifying persons in the church as enemies: persons you want to avoid, persons about which you can find nothing good to say, persons who are obviously not true believers, then you need to check your service motivation. In Christ, we are freed from repressed and hidden fear and anger.
- If you find yourself talking a lot about what people ought to believe, but you are not doing anything for Christ, then you need to check your service motivation. In Christ, we are freed from doctrinal arguments so that we may grow in loving service.
- If you find yourself experiencing God's call but continue to add excuse after excuse as to why you cannot serve, then you need to check your shadow side. You are allowing a voice other than Christ to motivate you and that is eternally dangerous.

In service to Christ Jesus we find joy even in the midst of exhaustion, love in spite of rejection, and peace even in turmoil. Christ has a place of service for you. Are you willing to set aside your ego, place your pride on the shelf, and serve?

## **The World Needs Christ Centered Servants!**

Service in the name of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God the Father is seeking to live by the example of Jesus washing feet! So how can you serve Christ in a foot washing way? You can:

- **The Practice of the Presence of Christ** Brother Lawrence in his book, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, says that we are to do everything we do as if we are doing it for Jesus. In your life, practice the presence of Christ.
  - When you wash the dishes, wash them as if Jesus will eat from them.
  - When you design an automobile remember that Christ will be riding in it.
  - When you teach a child, you are teaching Christ.
  - As you grow your family please remember that Christ is present in your home.
  - When you build a home, remodel a kitchen, or grade a driveway, you are doing work for Christ your Lord.
  - Be sure to allow the Christ in you to respond to the Christ in the other person you meet, especially at home.

As you practice the presence of Christ, you make the decision each day of the rest of your life that you will serve Christ! You will each moment of each day:

### **Decide to Serve Christ with your life!**

In your special service to Christ, practice the presence of Christ in your everyday life. We are free to serve by the power of Christ. If you ask, Christ will give you a passion for service. Christ does not expect you to solve all the problems of the world. Christ will give you one area where you can make a difference. Get involved in that area with the passion of Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit will give you with all you need to do the work. Forget being afraid! Forget comparing yourself to others! When Christ calls you to service, Christ will provide all you need to do the job well. The Scripture says: "Through love serve one another."

Service is a privilege.....assume it!  
 Service is a challenge.....meet it!  
 Service is a journey.....complete it!  
 Service is a gift.....accept it!  
 Service is a promise..... fulfill it!  
 Service is friendship..... enjoy it!  
 Service is a goal.....achieve it!  
 Service is vision.....share it!  
 Service is the future..... build it!  
 Service is action..... just do it!

Christian service begins with a decision and blesses you with an inner experience of God's joy.

Joshua challenged the people of Israel to choose whom they would serve. After finishing the conquest of Canaan, the people gathered for worship. Joshua said,

***"Choose this day whom you will serve, as for me and my house we will serve the Lord."***  
***(Joshua 24:15)*** ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=joshua+24:15](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=joshua+24:15))

Joshua challenged every one of us to follow his example. Putting God first in your life is the challenge that Jesus laid before us all. A clear, continuing choice is demanded. Will you serve the Lord God or will you serve a lesser god? To know the true freedom and blessings of Christ Jesus you must decide to participate in loving, foot washing, service. We are challenged by Holy Scripture: choose first whom you will serve!

### **Freedom in Christ is found in servinq!**

Foot washing service is actually living in a part of the heavenly realm while still walking on this earth. The opposite is also true. We can experience hell on earth if we choose to live together biting and tearing at each other. Jesus is challenging each one of you to know the passion for service that God is placing in your mind and heart. Jesus is challenging you to choose to trust in God and to serve God and God alone. Jesus is challenging you to know the great freedom that comes from serving Christ. There is a story that summarizes the difference between service and self indulgence.

A man spoke with the Lord about heaven and hell. The Lord said to the man, "Come, I will show you hell." They enter a room where a group of people sat around a huge pot of stew. Everyone was famished,

desperate and starving. Each held a spoon that reached the pot, but each spoon had a handle so much longer than their own arm that it could not be used to get in stew into their own mouths. The suffering was terrible.

"Come, now I will show you heaven," the Lord said after awhile. They entered another room, identical to the first --- the pot of stew, the groups of people, the same long-handled spoons. But there everyone was happy and well-nourished.

"I don't understand," said the man. "Why are they happy here when they were miserable in the other room and everything was the same?"

The Lord smiled. "Ah, it is simple," He said. "Here they have learned to serve each other." (Jack Canfield and Mark V. Hansen, [A 2<sup>nd</sup> Helping of Chicken Soup for the Soul](#), p. 55)

Will you join god's people lovingly serving each other and the world' Or, will you ultimately starve yourself into hell? The choice is yours. Holy Scripture tells us that foot washing, loving service in Christ's name can be known by the quality of joy within our hearts. "*Serve the lord with gladness*", Scripture says, "*come into God's presence with singing.*" (**Psalm 100:2**) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+100:2](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+100:2)) A key ingredient in Christ centered, loving service is the inner joy that comes to us as we do the work of God. You can only know great joy when you are involved in Christ centered service.

- There is a satisfaction beyond our imagining when we serve the Lord.
- There is a meaning we cannot experience except when we serve the Lord.
- There is a joy that our entertainment satiated culture cannot understand when we serve the Lord.

There is joy even when we are exhausted by doing God's work. Loving service under the direction of the Holy Spirit utilizing the gifts of God following the example of Jesus Christ builds a community of friends that will last for all eternity.

Wash feet? Clean a toilet? Shovel snow? Teach children? Guide youth? Share Christ with another? Feed the poor? Shelter the homeless? Stand up for the outcastes and marginalized?

Serve the Lord! Serve the Lord! Yes, Serve the Lord!