

Being a Servant Like Jesus

John 13:12–17

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Rev Joe Sanders

First Baptist Church Coshocton, Ohio

As a young adult I went on a mission trip. I was a leader in the church youth group. We took the students to Sunbright, Tennessee. It's a spot on the map in the mountains.

We were working with Habitat for Humanity. The project I was working on was an outhouse. The family had no indoor plumbing. That seemed unreal to me in 1980. They had a water hand pump and an outhouse that was falling over.

One morning when we were working we saw a little guy, called Peanut, come out the house and squat down. We were extra motivated. However, my initial motivation was to prove that I could do this work. For me it wasn't about compassion, serving others, or being a role model. I was there as a test of manhood: I can do the work.

My thoughts today are about our motivation for the work we do. As disciples who make disciples we need to be ready to help new disciples learn how and why we serve in the Kingdom of God. For Jesus, it's about your motivation.

John 13:12 (ESV) 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?"

He washed His disciples feet then made it clear, no one is too important to serve. The disciples forgot to have someone wash everyone's feet. Jesus had sent Peter and John to prepare for the Passover Meal. This was a meal filled with tradition and ritual in order to remember God's deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

The meal included lamb, bread, bitter herbs, unleavened bread, wine and a sweet item. The lamb would need to be dedicated to God's service and killed. The bread would need to be baked. The herbs had to be gathered and prepared. The sweet food item would also need to be made. The room where they were to gather would need to be prepared. The wine, bread, lamb, bitter herbs, and the sweet item needed to be placed on the table. All the cushions for lounging at the table would need to be put in place.

It was a busy day for these two men. This was not brought together in just a few minutes or hours. It was an all day affair to make sure every detail was handled properly. But in the midst of all the activity Peter and John failed to make the arrangements for every one to have their feet washed. That wasn't part of the Passover preparations, but it was part of being a good host. In a dry, arid land where dust is everywhere, it was the custom for someone, usually a slave to wash the feet of the guests. This was not a dignified, proper activity for the home owner or the host to wash the guests feet. For Jesus' last Passover with the disciples there was no one designated to wash their feet.

His ministry was lived as a servant, but somehow I believe that from childhood to being an adult Jesus had a willingness to serve others. Throughout His ministry Jesus serves people. He casts out demons. He raises the dead. He makes the blind to see. He takes away leprosy. He removes

diseases. He makes the lame whole. He teaches them truth about faith in God. He shows them how to live a life of faith in God.

He was an example from the day He called each one to follow Him to the day He ascended to heaven. They wanted to make Jesus their king, He wanted them to see Him as a servant. More than just looking upon Him as a servant, Jesus wanted His disciples to become servants. They needed to learn, they needed to follow, they needed to serve one another, and they needed to serve world.

An example isn't an example if the example isn't followed. A follower of Jesus isn't a disciple of Jesus if they aren't serving others. Wherever we plant the seed of the Gospel of Jesus, we water it with service teaching others why and how to serve. Planting seeds of the Gospel of Jesus requires watering the seed with service, teaching others that this is a form of God's love. Before the harvest of the Gospel of Jesus has taken place, sinners will have been served God's love over and over again.

John 13:13 (ESV) You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. For Jesus to say He is the I Am He's saying He is God. Even though Joe Sanders is independent, I'm not all-powerful or all-knowing. I have done a lot of different things in my life. I built a sailboat. I'm remodeling an old, old house. I've carried shingles, hung gutters, and sanded drywall. I have a bachelor's degree and a master's degree. I've taught school, cleaned toilets, and painted houses. I've been married since 1978 and raised two sons. I've lead mission trips to the inner city and also to the rural counties in Pennsylvania and Ohio. My list of activities and accomplishments are numerous and varied. I've lead Bible studies and I've baptized people in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Even though I brag about all this, I'm not all-knowing and I'm not all-powerful. My flaws and weaknesses are many. Somedays they seem to out number my strengths. There are days when I don't care and I don't care that I don't care. They are few are and far between. My mistakes if piled up on one another would be a mountain. There have been more than I would care to recall. I fall down more than I would like to admit.

All of this being said, I'm obviously not all-knowing and all-powerful. I need help. I have a long ways to go to be perfect. I need improvement in many areas of my life. I can always be a better servant in the Kingdom of God. I can always be a better disciple of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the Son of God, who has taken away the sin of the world by dying on the cross. He got on His knees and washed His disciples feet. He is the perfect person. He is perfect in mercy, grace, and love. His perfection is complete, nothing can ever be better. His mercy is the fulfilment of all mercy. His grace satisfies every situation, scenario, and circumstance. His love is endless and unconditional.

Jesus is the great I AM that spoke to Moses from the burning bush. He is the one true and living God. He is all-powerful and all-knowing. He has seen the past, the present and the future. He is actively working in the lives of saints and sinners alike.

When He says I AM, He is making the claim to be God. I am not. You are not. We are not complete in mercy, grace, and love. We are not perfect as servants. We cannot even muster the mercy, grace, and love that is needed to be a servant. We need the help of Jesus and the Holy Spirit to be a servant. We need Jesus as our example and as our helper.

We are told by Jesus to see the person next to us as worthy of being served. Can we look at the people around us and see that we have been called to serve them?

John 13:14–15 (ESV) 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.

When we choose to be a disciple of Jesus, we choose to do what Jesus did. Faith in Jesus is more than saying a prayer. How many times when we're at our wits ends to do we finally turn to Jesus? More than we can count. How many times do we look at our own needs and fail to see the needs of another person? More than we can count. How many times have we promised to serve Jesus if He delivered us and then failed to keep the promise? More than we can count.

Jesus' words and His actions always matched. I'm just as guilty as you are of saying one thing and then not following through. Jesus did the job of a slave, He washed His disciples feet. Everyone of them must have been embarrassed that Jesus was on His knees removing the dust from their feet. Each one of them felt the shame that they had not been the slave. They were caught up in their own ideas, thoughts, conversations, and discussions. They were too important to cleanse one another of the dust that gathered on their feet.

For Jesus this wasn't even close to the depth of service He would do for His disciples and for everyone. We know that Jesus would die on the cross as a servant in God's Kingdom to cleanse us of our sins. He died serving our greatest need, removing the penalty of our sins. Jesus had no line in the sand of what He would not do to serve us. Jesus took serving in God's Kingdom as His highest priority.

But, we have a line in the sand don't we? As Jesus' disciples where do we draw the line on serving others? There are things that we refuse to do in the service of God's Kingdom, right? We give money to ministries in our community, but will we talk to those who are hungry? We like missionaries in far away lands translating the Bible, teaching people how to be pastors, providing medical training. But, we struggle to see our own community as a mission field and how to serve people.

Living as a disciple of Jesus means reading His Word, talking to Him, and then taking action. We can continue to speak the truth. And our actions can match our words. It is emotionally and spiritually putting on the robe of a slave. Jesus took off His outer garments, wrapped a towel around His waist and washed His disciples feet. He became a slave and served the people closest to Him. Then He challenged them to do the same.

As the disciples put on that robe of being a slave in God's Kingdom, they discovered something. They discovered that they were blessed. They realized that as a slave in God's Kingdom they were empowered, they were free. They weren't bound by any limitations. They weren't bound by any restrictions.

They discovered they were a blessing to others. They could see that they were worthy to minister to the person standing next to them. They could see the needs of the people around them. They recognized the power of the Holy Spirit working through them. Doing what Jesus did for others became something they could do. They were being like Jesus in grace, mercy, love, and action.

John 13:16–17 (ESV) Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

Therefore, put on the robe of a slave and serve in the name of Jesus. Jesus is more to you than just a Savior, He is the Lord of all your life. When you give your life to Jesus, asking Him to forgive your sins, He becomes your Savior. Jesus' death on the cross paid the price for you to be forgiven. His shed blood, His life of complete faithfulness and trust in God made Him the only sacrifice that would pay the penalty for your sin. He took your place, satisfying the judgment of God upon your sins.

You have lived a life of unfaithfulness and unbelief in God's love and grace, mercy and power. You have seen your life as your own, lived it for yourself, regardless of God's plans for your life. When you gave your life to Jesus, when you confessed your sin and turned to Jesus, He saved you. Jesus reached out to you, took you by the hand, and lifted you out of the sliminess of sin. Jesus set you on a path of trust, faith and ministry.

Did you make Jesus your Lord? Did you choose to let Jesus lead your life? Did you allow Jesus to give you new priorities, new motivations, new thoughts, new actions? Every believer in Jesus' love, mercy and grace to forgive your sins, can also choose to make Jesus Lord. If you only make Jesus your Savior and not choose Him as your Lord, then you haven't truly, honestly given Him your sins. So, maybe He isn't really your Savior, just your comfort food.

Choose Jesus as your Savior and be forgiven and also make Him Lord of your life. Allow Him to enter not just the parts of you that need salvation, but open the door and let Him transform your actions, your thoughts, your motivation.

This will lead to a robe. It is the robe of a slave. This robe is the desire to serve in the Kingdom of God. By putting on this robe of a slave to serve in God's Kingdom you are choosing to be transformed. Not only will your attitudes and motivations be changed, but your actions will change. You will discover that you are doing the very things Jesus did. You will be serving the people around you. You will see yourself as a servant. You will see yourself ministering to the people you know and even strangers.

Make the choice to be forgiven by Jesus and to live for Jesus. Make the choice now to trust Jesus as your Savior and your Lord.