

He Took a Towel

John 13:1-15

[Note: Occasionally, I perform a dramatic monologue in place of a traditional sermon. Although I wrote the following monologue for Holy Week, it could be used at any time during the year.]

Walk in from the back of the sanctuary. Carry a towel and a washbasin. A costume, such as a white alb with no stole, would make the sermon more effective.

Good morning. My name is John. I was one of Jesus' disciples. I would like to tell you about some of my experiences with Jesus. You are probably wondering why I brought a towel and washbasin. Let me explain.

I remember one night in particular, many years ago. It was Passover, and Jesus wanted his disciples to celebrate it together. We met in an upper room in Jerusalem. During the meal Jesus rose from the table, gathered a washbasin like this one, poured out some water, and began to wash our feet. We could hardly believe it. Here was our Master, our Lord, and He was acting like a common servant. It was extremely awkward. When Jesus came to Peter, Peter said what we were all thinking: "No Lord, you should not wash my feet!" It seemed so out of place, so wrong. But Jesus insisted that He do so. As we sat in silence while Jesus washed our feet, I began to think about what was happening. Here was our Lord, the Christ, the Son of God, acting like a common slave and washing our feet. And yet, as I thought about it, it was not so strange after all. In a sense, He was always washing others' feet. He was always a servant, always meeting people's needs.

The thing that most impressed me about Jesus was His deep compassion and love for people. He cared about people and ministered to their needs.

Jesus cared about people's physical needs. One day we were passing through Jericho. A blind man named Bartimaeus cried out for help. At first I paid him no mind; he was just another blind beggar. But he kept on shouting, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus heard him shouting. He stopped and walked over to him. Jesus touched his eyes and healed him.

Jesus often helped people who were sick. He healed the blind, the lame, and the mentally ill. I remember when a man with leprosy came to Jesus for help. All the disciples were upset. Nobody wanted to get close to a leper. As we watched, Jesus actually touched this man. We could hardly believe our eyes. Yet Jesus loved him and cared about his suffering. When Jesus touched him, his leprosy went away.

Once five thousand people gathered to hear Jesus teach. The day came to an end, and everyone was hungry. We advised Jesus to send them away. He said, "Give them something to eat." And with two fish and five loaves of bread, he fed the whole crowd. He often met people's physical needs.

Jesus also cared about people's emotional needs. He had compassion on those who grieved and those who were depressed, discouraged, or confused. Many times Jesus helped his own disciples when we were emotionally upset. I remember one time in after Jesus had been killed and resurrected. He was talking to Peter. Peter felt badly about having denied Jesus three times. Jesus said to him, "Do you love me?" It hurt Peter because he had failed Jesus. But Peter did love Jesus and said, "Yes, Lord, I love you." Then Jesus asked him a second time and then a third. Peter was grieved but said for the third time, "Yes, Lord, I love you." After this was over, we all realized what Jesus had done. Peter had denied Jesus three times. And now Jesus had given him the opportunity to reaffirm his love three times. Afterwards, Peter and Jesus embraced. I heard Jesus say to Peter, "Peter, I love you, and I forgive you." It was a healing event for Peter. He gained much strength from it. Jesus often met people's emotional needs.

Jesus also cared about people's spiritual needs. More than anything else, Jesus wanted people to know God. I remember the night Nicodemus came to see Jesus. Jesus told him that he needed to be born again. Jesus was teaching him that people need spiritual life and renewal which only God can provide.

For three years I followed Jesus. I saw him care about people again and again. He ministered to their needs, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual. And he constantly taught us to do the same. He told us that if we wanted to be great we must be servants. He told us over and over, "Care about people; minister to their needs."

I thought of these things that night as Jesus washed our feet. It was a strange night, a scary night. Jesus took bread and wine and said they represented his body and blood, which would be broken and shed for us. He spoke of dying. We didn't understand. After supper we went up on the mountain. Jesus was deeply distressed. He asked Peter, James, and me to pray with Him. He was in great agony. We were so tired, however, that we fell asleep. We woke to the sound of Roman soldiers. It was a nightmare. Jesus was arrested, and we all ran like scared animals.

We kept up with the situation the best we could. We learned that Jesus was being seen by various officials and He was on trial. Then the word came; Jesus was to be crucified. We could not believe it. Why? Because he loved. I felt that my life was caving in all around me. All my hopes and dreams were invested in Jesus, and now they were going to kill him. He was mocked and beaten and finally led to Golgotha. We were hiding, afraid that we might be next.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, came to me and asked if I would take her to Jesus. I said no at first. I tried to explain that it was a horrible sight to see a man crucified. I was also worried that the officials might recognize us. But Mary persisted, and I finally gave in.

As we arrived at the execution site, I felt sick. It was a gruesome and horrible scene. Death was everywhere. The people were mocking Jesus, and the Roman soldiers were laughing and having a great time. I was filled with hatred and anger. I was also angry at myself for having failed my Lord. I wanted Jesus to kill them all—the entire, hate-filled crowd. And I knew He had the power to do it but that He would not.

We moved a little closer to the cross where Jesus hung. He was talking. I could barely make out what he said. It was hard to believe what Jesus was saying. He said, "Father, forgive them." Those animals were killing Jesus, and He was asking God to forgive them!

In spite of his pain and agony, Jesus took time to speak to the man on the cross next to him. He assured the man that he could be forgiven and would be with God in paradise that very day. He was still meeting people's needs, all the way to the end. Then Jesus looked directly at me. I felt ashamed. I had run away and deserted Him when the soldiers came. And yet His eyes were filled with love. He also looked at his mother, Mary, who was weeping. Then he said to me, "Behold your mother!" He then looked at Mary and said, "Behold your son!" We knew

exactly what He was doing. He was making provisions for His mother. He was caring for her needs even as he was dying.

In those last moments before he died, Jesus continued to think about others. He was concerned about the people who were killing Him, about the thief next to Him, and about His mother. He was a servant to the end, caring for people and meeting their needs in his death, even as he did in life. He was the man for others, the servant of all. Once again he had a towel in His hands, and he was washing others' feet.

Of course, you know the story. After the darkness of the cross, God raised Jesus from the dead. And then Jesus established his church to continue his ministry through the ages.

Yet I will never forget that night in the upper room when Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, got down on his hands and knees and washed our feet. And as he did, he taught us a great lesson. "As I have done to you," He said, "so you should do to others." Although he was the Christ, he carried a towel in his hands and washed others' feet. When I think of that night, I recall the words he often said: "Go and do likewise."

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