

Tom Hansen – First Presbyterian Church of Grand Junction, CO

April 5, 2020 (Palm Sunday)

"Walking With Peter: Clean Feet"

Mark 11:1-10 (Triumphal Entry), John 13:1-17 (Foot Washing)

Traditionally on Palm Sunday, we focus on Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. Our prelude, Call to Worship and two hymns were chosen to help us do that; and we even got a few palm branches in there. For today, because we are Walking With Peter as he walks with Jesus, we are looking at yet another moment when Jesus and Peter have direct conversation. Their dialogue is in the midst of something meant to bring clarity to the disciples – clarity about who Jesus was and who they were called to be with one another. Instead, through Peter, we see more confusion. [Please read or listen to last week's sermon first because I more thoroughly developed this notion of clarity and confusion – which is so key to understanding Peter and ourselves more fully.] So we're in John 13 sometime before the Passover meal, observing a foot washing initiated by Jesus.

Reenacting this moment often happens on Maundy Thursday of Holy Week. How many of you have ever participated in an actual foot washing ceremony? We've had foot washing services here a few times in my 15 years, but in my former church we celebrated it every Thursday of Holy Week just before our dinner and Maundy Thursday service. We never had that many people attend the foot washing in the sanctuary, but it was very intimate and a little uncomfortable. And my Senior Pastor would always wash my feet, take his time, and talk to me throughout. It was a blessing, once I got used to it.

This moment we read about in John 13 is a little jarring for Peter. Going from Palm Sunday to Foot washing is a big '180' for him. He should have realized that Jesus was a different kind of King when the One he proclaimed as Messiah rode into town on a donkey instead of a stallion/warhorse; but all Peter could think about was being 2nd Lieutenant in Jesus' brigade. In a matter of days, Jesus goes from powerful (at least the definition of power the disciples have in their minds) to powerless. Washing feet was what slaves did; or at least the lowest one on the ladder of leadership in the room. Washing feet was disgusting because – unlike our foot washing services when people actually wash their feet BEFORE they go to church – the people in Jesus' day walked around in sandals on dusty streets; streets that were the receptacles of everyone's trash and waste; streets that served as paths for animals and anything they left behind. Gross, right?

There was nothing glamorous about this moment. Nobody was giving Jesus leadership points for this surprising move. There's nothing romantic about this foot washing service. Plus, the room is filled with two men who will betray Jesus. We don't have time to go into Judas, who has already given in to the devil's temptation (John 13:2), but after Jesus is arrested, Peter betrays Jesus too. When asked point blank if he was with Jesus, Peter says, "I don't even know the man!" (See John 18)

So what can we learn from Jesus, from Peter, and from this foot washing moment?

What can we apply to our own life? I see four things that you and I might need to hear from the act of love and service. I see a connection to our new mission statement in the first two, and a message we really need to hear right now in the second two.

### 1. **Know who you are.**

When we talk about being "Rooted in Jesus and Growing in His Love" we are talking about identity. Jesus knows who He is, and who He is not. He knows "the Father has put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God." (John 13:3) It's so hard to get the serving and being-served-thing right when we don't know who we are. In our insecurity, our service becomes more about us than others and our supposed humility becomes another attention-getting device. Identity is key, and has been throughout Peter's journey with Jesus. Do you and I know who we are, and who we are not? Do we know who we belong to and in whose presence we will eventually be? Know who you are.

### 2. **Serve Others.** ("Branch Out")

This is the most obvious application of the passage and the one we hear about most often. Jesus says, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." (John 13:15) Dale Bruner reminds us that John 13 is also symbolic of the Gospel and what Jesus has done to wash us clean; but true to scripture, Bruner combines both salvation and service:

*"Jesus' Footwashing is not only a perfect depiction of what God has done for us in Jesus' atoning work to us through Word, sacraments, Church, and prayer (see Acts 2:42), it also shows disciples how they can live their lives in the most 'blessed' possible way: in mutual service . . . Good listening in conversation, good hospitality with visitors and guests, good attention to customers, clients, students and colleagues in business and work, good presence with spouse and children, good 'being there AT YOUR SERVICE' as a whole way of life – these and hundreds of other daily responsibilities and privileges are wonderfully pictured by Jesus' Footwashing gift. Jesus' Footwashing not only teaches the Christian gospel, but it also teaches the Christian ethic." (Dale Bruner in *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*) We are called to "Branch Out" and serve others . . . right now.*

I'm thrilled that just this week we were able to recruit over 60 Callers and Errand Runners. I'm proud of the fact that right after our office was closed, one of our staff members and her spouse showed up for stuffing bags at Kids Aid. I was excited to read in the paper this week that Canyon View Vineyard Church stepped up big and brought in Convoy of Hope to our community. I'm always amazed at the many ways our people serve those around them, inside and outside the church, by being good listeners and encouragers. Here's an idea about how to serve others. If you get one of the government checks and don't need it because your income stream hasn't been affected by this pandemic, give it to a family in need. Give it to an organization or ministry that might not survive without your help. Branch out and serve others by washing their feet in practical ways.

**3. Grieve what you have lost.** This includes losing and grieving the wrong picture of Jesus you've held onto and need to keep letting go of every Lent and Holy Week as we follow Jesus to the cross. Jesus was not the King his followers imagined. The crucifixion was not the outcome they anticipated. Grieve the loss of the picture you and I need to stop carrying around in our wallets and purses of a God who is at our beck-and-call, as long as we are faithful and obedient. You might not think you carry one of those but almost all of us have one in there at one time or another. Grieve the fact that the King of Kings who appeared poised and ready to pounce on Rome and take back the nation, lost the battle and bled on a criminal's cross. Peter isn't ready to let go of the illusion that Jesus would rule with great strength on an earthly throne with Peter as His Vice President. Peter wasn't even aware yet that he was about to lose everything, let alone his hoped-for status as Second in Command.

Can we just talk about plain old grief too? We must – even while we know who we are and serve others out of a relationship rooted in Jesus – [we must] grieve the disappointment of dashed hopes and unmet expectations. Can I give us permission to grieve? Grieve the fact that 2020 is the year when: March Madness (and all our favorite sports traditions) didn't happen, graduations were postponed until the middle of the summer and not everyone came, you lost your job or your friend lost their job; or a friend lost their life. Grieve the fact that just when you had all your kids in school and were starting to find your life again, you became a home school teacher. Grieve that you cannot do your job face-to-face right now. Grieve the loss of your savings account or some of your 401K. Grieve that you will not be in church on Easter Sunday. Go ahead and grieve. Because, if we don't grieve, we'll never discover what God has for us on the other side of our disappointments, pain and brokenness . . . . which is being washed by Jesus.

**4. Be washed by Jesus.** Let me ask a couple of questions:

How hard is it for you to ask for help? What do you have a hard time letting God do for you?

It is SO hard for us to receive what Jesus desires to do for us. We're not 100% sure as to why Peter refuses to let Jesus wash his feet. Earl Palmer observes that what Peter says is a "complex mixture of feelings [and] meanings." (from *The Intimate Gospel*) When Peter says, "You will never wash my feet," (John 13:8) it could be a blend of not wanting to dishonor his Master, not allowing his idealized picture of Jesus to be obliterated, and just plain finding it hard to receive. I'd like to focus on this last, (in my mind) most obvious reason. It's hard to receive help – especially as we get more established and self-sufficient. Earl Palmer reminds us that "Receiving heightens a person's sense of vulnerability, whereas Peter is a rocklike person." (p.117) And we, as Americans, like to be rocklike more than vulnerable, don't we?

It's hard to ask for help when our marriages are failing and our kids are struggling and our money is running out. And it's hard to ask people if we can help them; if they need our help. I remember after the financial crisis over a decade ago when people were really struggling financially. We had some folks in the church who wanted to anonymously help families and

individuals who were deeply affected and struggling with rent and mortgage payments. It's a tricky thing to know when to step in and offer help. I remember being pretty sure that a family could use several hundred dollars to make a house payment; but didn't want to offend or overstep. But we took a chance and had a check made. When I delivered it, I truly didn't know if it's what they needed or if they'd be embarrassed or offended or say they didn't need it. Instead it was "just what they needed that month."

One of my biggest concerns about all the people we had step forward to make calls to those who are more at risk because of this virus will say they don't need any extra help. We have all these people ready to run errands, and maybe save lives by keeping people safer, and it will be hard for people to ask for help. It can be so hard to say, "Can you please help me? I need help. I'm really struggling and scared." And that's just about letting other people help you.

How about letting Jesus help you, by washing you clean? Peter just can't go there with Jesus, who is wrapped in a serving towel with a basin of water. Last week (Matthew 16:13-25) Peter got it right initially ("You are the Christ"), and then got it wrong ("I will never let them kill you"). But he gets it wrong **both times** in John 13. First, he doesn't want to let Jesus wash his feet and then – when Jesus makes it clear it's the only way to share in His life – he demands that Jesus washes ALL of him. Notice that Peter is both telling Jesus what He should NOT do, and then Peter's trying to tell Jesus how He should wash Peter. **Is it possible Peter has some control issues?** Is it possible that you . . . have some control issues? I know I do. [We may be feeling control issues more now than ever; thus the toilet paper thing.]

If we're going to Walk With Jesus, we have to give up control; surrender; die to ourselves; follow Him wherever He leads and no matter what He does.

Know who you are. Jesus did.

    Serve Others. Jesus did.

        Grieve what you have lost. Jesus did. [Gethsemane]

            Let Jesus wash you. He did and He will.

I want to send us off into the rest of Holy Week with the first and last verses:

"Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to leave this world and go the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He now showed them the full extent of His love." (John 13:1)  
Another way to think of 'the full extent' is 'to the last drop.'

**Pay Attention to 'the full extent' of Jesus' love during this very different Holy Week. You all have Bibles. Read through the story again and again.**

"Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." (John 13:17)

**Let's make this a holy week, both by celebrating the events of Jesus' last week as diligently and creatively as we can AND by loving God and others 'to the last drop.'**