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John 13:1-17 – *The Life of Peter: Being Washed*

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We've been walking with Peter and the other disciples...

On their journey following Christ.

They started out not knowing Jesus...

And Jesus extended the invitation to them:

“Come and see.”

Then they started following Jesus...

Learning more of who he is and what it means to be his disciple.

They are maturing in their relationship with him...

Growing in their love for God and love for other people.

The last few weeks we've seen things through the eyes of Peter:

Peter stepped out of the boat and started walking on water...

Then he took his eyes off Jesus and began sinking.

Peter rebuked Jesus...

Telling him that he shouldn't talk about suffering and dying...

Because he's the Messiah!

Peter is a captivating figure...

Because he embodies so much of *our* journey—

Our journey of doubt, faith, questioning, boldness, and fear.

Today we're looking at another situation through Peter's eyes...

Another opportunity for him to grow in his understanding of who Jesus is...

And what he's come to do.

An opportunity to grow as a disciple of the Lord.

John 13:1-17

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

<sup>2</sup>The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. <sup>3</sup>Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; <sup>4</sup>so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. <sup>5</sup>After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

<sup>6</sup>He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

<sup>7</sup>Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

<sup>8</sup>"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

<sup>9</sup>"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

<sup>10</sup>Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." <sup>11</sup>For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

<sup>12</sup>When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. <sup>13</sup>"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup>Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup>I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. <sup>16</sup>Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup>Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

Once again Peter tries to put the brakes on Jesus.

He sees his Teacher...the Messiah—

the one who changed water into wine...

The one who walked on water—

Get up during the meal;  
Take off his outer garments;  
Wrap a long towel around his waist;  
Pour water into a bowl;  
Get down on his knees;  
And begin washing the dust-covered feet of his students.

You can imagine the look of shock on Peter's face...

The dumbfounded look on the rest of the disciples' faces.

The scene was probably in slow motion for Peter...

As Jesus made his way around the table washing feet:

“What is happening right now?!”

Jesus finishes washing James' feet;

Picks up his water bowl;

Slides on his knees;

And scoots his way in front of Peter...

The student now looking down at his Teacher.

The disciple looking down at his Master:

“Lord, are *you* going to wash *my* feet?”

Peter is emphatic:

“You will *NEVER* wash my feet!”

Peter's response is understandable.

The disciples would have been fine washing Jesus' feet...

As a show of service and honor to their Teacher. (Carson)

They would have grimaced at washing each other's feet...

Maybe they would have done it on a rare occasion as an expression of love.

But having Jesus wash their feet flipped their world upside down...

It was unheard of for them.

This was a job fit for the household servant...

Not even a Jewish servant was typically expected to do this...

It was reserved for the Gentile servants.

In this culture of honor and shame...

Jesus' action would have been completely shocking and backwards...

And very embarrassing for the disciples.

So, when Jesus comes to Peter, Peter objects:

"You will never wash my feet!"

**Peter refuses Jesus.**

But in doing so, **Peter refuses Jesus' self-sacrificing love.**

See, something deeper is going on in this scene—

Jesus is not just washing feet as an example of service...

He's not just giving a lesson in humility—

Jesus is pointing to (foreshadowing) the work that he will soon accomplish on the cross.

We're supposed to read this footwashing scene in the light of what's ahead—

The cross—

And the author, John, gives us clues all over the place.

First, he tells us that it's just before the Passover Festival.

John has been developing this theme since chapter one when he says:

"Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." (1:29)

The Passover Lamb represented salvation to Israel.

Next, Jesus knows that his "hour has come." (13:1)

This is the hour toward which he's been walking all of his life...

The time of his sacrificial death on the cross.

And if we aren't sure Jesus is talking about his impending death, it says:

"...for him to leave this world...and return to God." (1:1-2)

We also see a statement about Jesus' being betrayed:

“Judas was already prompted to betray him.” (1:2)

Betray Jesus to what?

Hand him over to the religious leaders who will have him crucified.

John wants us to see this action of Jesus in the light of the crucifixion.

Jesus isn't concerned about his disciples having clean feet...

He knows their whole being must be clean:

“Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” (1:8)

“Unless you let me do my thing for you...”

“You have no fellowship with me.”

“You have no eternal inheritance from me.”

“Unless you let me love you by giving myself for you...”

“You have no part with me.”

“Allow me to humble myself for your sake...”

“Allow me to offer my life for your life on the cross...”

“Allow me to take away your sins...”

“Let me wash you.”

Peter doesn't want his fellowship with Jesus the Messiah to be cut off...

So he says, “Yes Lord! My feet, hands, and head too!”

“All of me! Wash all of me!”

**Jesus loves his disciples completely.**

Jesus loves them to the uttermost.

He shows them the full extent of his love.

And it is by giving his life for them.

All the disciples need to do—

All that Peter needs to do—

Is accept the sacrifice that Christ makes on their behalf.

“Yes, of course! Believe that Christ died for my sins.”

“Accept his humble sacrifice on the cross...”

This makes sense to us...

But how often do we do what Peter did and refuse Jesus' love?

How often do we refuse Christ's self-sacrificial love?

Sometimes it comes in the form of failing to acknowledge our sin...

Or failing to acknowledge that our sin is significant.

“I don't need to be washed.”

“I'm not dirty.”

We minimize the things we think do and say...

Maybe comparing them to what we see in others.

Compared to what we see others doing—

What we see on the news...

Or even what we know other Christians are doing—

We're doing pretty good.

Psalm 36 says:

There is no fear of God  
before their eyes.

In their own eyes they flatter themselves  
too much to detect or hate their sin.

Do we have a right-sized view of ourselves?

Do we think that the Lord is comparing us to other people?

Of course, if we flatter ourselves—

If we don't take sin or God's standards seriously—

We see no need to be washed.

Of course we refuse Jesus' love saying, “I don't need this...”

“I don't need you to clean me.”

Sometimes this refusal of Christ comes out of pride:

“I can wash myself.”

We recognize the way we live isn’t right before God—

We recognize that we need a good washing—

But in our pride, we try to take care of it on our own...

Refusing to be washed by Christ.

So we work hard at trying to make the good things we do outweigh the bad things:

“If I just go to church enough, then I’ll make up for that destructive habit.”

“If I try harder in this area of my life, then that other area will look better.”

“I can do this on my own...”

“I can fix myself if I just look deep enough within me...”

“I don’t need help.”

“I can wash myself.”

Or sometimes we operate based on the feeling that nothing can cleanse us:

“I know I’ve messed up...”

“I’ve messed up big time!”

“I remember that thing from my past that replays in my mind each and every day.”

“And nothing can take that away.”

“No amount of washing can take this stain out.”

In all of these ways, we’re refusing the love of Christ.

Along with Peter we say:

“*You will never wash me.*”

Christ is offering us his self-sacrificing love to us—

Offering to wash us—

And we refuse it for whatever the reason:

“I’m not dirty.”

“I can wash myself.”

“Nothing can make me clean.”

What we need to hear is that:

1. We do need to be washed...

All of us have sinned and done what is wrong...

No exceptions...whether you see it or not.

2. We cannot wash ourselves...

Our sin and misery are too great...

The dirt is caked on too thick for us to clean it ourselves.

We need someone more powerful to wash us.

3. No dirt is too great for the washing of Christ.

Jesus is God...

And his sacrifice washes the vilest offense against God.

His sacrifice washes away all of our sin completely.

God is able to wash us clean.

But his love must be accepted...

We must admit our dependence on him.

We must allow Christ to humble himself...

And offer his life for us.

If you want fellowship with God—

If you want sins forgiven...

If you want to live a new life...

And to even have a shot at loving others in the same self-sacrificing way—

Christ must wash you.

“Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”

Jesus loves us completely...

All of our being...

Even those unlovely parts that we don't love about ourselves.

Jesus loves us to the uttermost.

*This* is where it begins.

We often want to skip right to the service part of things...

But it begins with being washed—

First being loved by Jesus.

Then we are invited to participate.

Then we are invited to love in the same way...

Taking the humble road.

There is no act of service beneath those who follow Christ.

There is no stooping too low in our service.

Jesus washes the feet of Judas...

The man who would have him killed.

And we're invited to love and serve in the same way.

But it begins with being washed by Christ.

There is nothing that love can do for us...

That Jesus has not already done. (NT Wright)

Let us give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love...

And his wonderful deeds for his people through Christ.

Amen.