



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

June 19, 2016 - John 13:1-17

"A Different Kind of Glory" (Encounters With Jesus Series)

The Rev. Dr. Tim Shaw

One of the best jobs that I had while I was in seminary was to wait on tables at a high-end restaurant in Pasadena near Fuller Seminary. It was a fantastic part time job. I made a lot of money, which helped me pay for some pretty hefty theological textbooks. It was fast-paced work, the shifts flew by, the staff was fun to be with and I really enjoyed, for the most part, waiting on the customers.

Learning how to wait on tables in this high-end restaurant took some extensive training that didn't always go well for the servers who were being trained. And it didn't always go well for the customers on the receiving end of their rookie efforts. One Saturday night when the restaurant was packed, the worst training disaster that I ever saw took place. I had nothing to do with this one.

Imagine this. Every booth and table in the restaurant was full. In one of those booths sat a couple dressed like they were on their way to the Academy Awards. Joy, one of our best servers, was training a young woman by the name of Doreen. Doreen was following Joy up the aisle to a table of eight in the back of the restaurant. Both Joy and Doreen had four plates of food on trays hoisted above their shoulders. That's eight plates of food balanced on two trays. As they were walking to their table, Joy said she suddenly heard Doreen say, "Oh!"

Joy stopped and turned around and said that all of a sudden all the sounds in the restaurant got muffled and the action slowed down so it was like she was in the Matrix. Joy turned around as Doreen lost her footing. Doreen pivoted in the direction of the couple on their way to the theater dressed up for the Academy Awards. Joy said she watched as Doreen launched four, very expensive dinners directly at these two people. Joy told me that she watched in horror as a couple of filet mignons and a number of baked potatoes filled with butter, sour cream and chives flew through the air in the direction of the couple.

What happened next defied the laws of physics. One of those baked potatoes hit this beautifully dressed woman directly in her perfectly coiffed head and for at least a second that baked potato stuck to her forehead. I'll spare you the details of what happened next except to say tables were overturned, food was on the floor, and the restaurant had a number of very large dry-cleaning bills to pay. Serving people is not an easy thing to do.

Our text today is all about serving people. In John chapter 13 we're going to experience two radical paradigm shifts. I'm convinced that some of us are going to have our view of God

reshaped just a bit and our understanding of how we are called to live our lives profoundly challenged.

A couple of years ago we did a sermon series based on some of the questions that God asks people in the Bible. People in the Bible ask a lot of questions. And, quite surprisingly, God asks the people in the Bible a lot of questions. Today, after Jesus washes His disciples feet, He turns to them and asks this extremely important question, "Do you know what I've done to you?" Jesus is asking us this same question today. "Do you know what I've done to you?"

You've made one of your bigger mistakes of the week showing up here today because we're going to see with great clarity what it is that Jesus has done to you and me. It was a big mistake showing up here today because when you and I see what Jesus has done for us and to us, there's a pretty good chance that we're going to have to reevaluate some things about our lives. Sure, we can try to shove it out of our minds. We can try to find a nice little compartment where we can try and manage what we're going to hear today, but the kind of news I've got to tell us today is not easily managed. It usually wrecks people's life when they truly begin to understand it. You may want to get out of here while you still can!

In the verses that lead up to this story in John 13 a couple of Greek guys come up to Jesus' disciples and ask for an appointment to see Jesus. So, His disciples come to Jesus with this request and Jesus sends back a strange response. They're not going to get an appointment with Jesus but what they're going to get is an opportunity to see who Jesus really is. They're going to see the glory of God in Jesus Christ and they're going to see that glory in a way that no one would have ever expected. They're going to see that glory on the cross of Christ.

Usually when we think of seeing someone in all their glory we're thinking of seeing someone with amazing beauty, great fame, power, intelligence, achievements and wealth. We associate glory with victory on the football field, or on a battlefield, or winning in the marketplace. We think glory is all about status, about getting the highest grade on the exam, or having our child perform well at the recital. We think glory is about some amazing achievement that gets us published in a peer-reviewed journal. We have an understanding of what is glorious that is completely different from what God says glory is all about.

Here's what the glory of God looks like. John chapter 13, verse 1. This is Jesus' last meal with his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion.

John 13:1 - *Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2 The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into*

his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, 4 got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8 Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." 9 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 10 Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." 11 For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

There are a couple of really important things that we need to understand. First, the roads in Palestine were either dusty or filled with mud (and other "stuff", by the way) depending on what time of year it was. People walked everywhere and all they had on their feet were sandals. By the time they reached their destination their feet were a mess. When you showed up at someone's house, you needed to have your feet cleaned.

Most apartments had a basin and a towel just inside the door. Washing someone else's feet was one of the lowest jobs a slave could have. If you were a Jewish slave you were not required to perform this task. It was an option. Only Gentile slaves were required to wash other people's feet. At their last meal together, the disciples were fighting with each other about who was going to be

the greatest in Jesus' kingdom. So, there was no chance that any of these guys were going to pick up that basin and towel and take on the task of washing feet.

This is an extremely vivid picture of the way all of us tend to approach our lives and particularly our relationships. In general, we're focused on how we're going to strengthen our position, not how we're going to take care of the needs of other people. We're focused on how we're going to end up on top in whatever we're doing. How will I prove to my boss that I'm the most valuable employee he has? How will I win the argument I'm having? How will I get my colleague to give in first and admit how wrong she's been? How will I beat that other car down the aisle in the parking lot and get that parking space closest to the store? We think glory is all about winning. We think glory is about not appearing weak. We think glory is about being served, being waited on, and not serving.

Jesus is the only one who picks up that basin and that towel and washes the feet of His disciples. That's what glory looks like to God. Jesus Christ, God in human flesh, stood up from the dinner table just as he had stood up from His throne in heaven. Here the God of the universe stripped off His outer garments just as He had laid aside the glory that was His in heaven. Here, the one who was fully God and fully human, wrapped Himself with a towel just as He had clothed Himself in our humanity.

Here we see God wash the feet of His friends by doing for them the most menial task, just like He would do the next day when He died a shameful death on the cross.

And after He finished washing His disciples' feet, we see Jesus take up His garment again, just like He would do when He rose from the dead and ascended to His Father. Jesus puts on His outer garment and took His place of honor at the table just as He would take His place of honor, once again with God the Father in heaven after He finished doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

That is paradigm shift number one. And it doesn't get any bigger than that. That is what lordship looks like according to Jesus. That's what leadership looks like. That is what glory looks like to God.

For Jesus, being Lord means being a servant, one who washes people's feet. For Jesus, foot washing is completely consistent with who He knows Himself to be. He washes His disciples feet not in spite of the fact that He is Lord, but precisely because He is Lord. Jesus knew exactly who He was, where He'd come from, and where He was heading. What He does here is not a contradiction of what it means to be God. This is a revelation of who God is. I challenge you to find, in any other world religion, a God who stoops down and washes His followers feet and dies for them that they might live.

How do WE respond to this? If you and I can really begin to see what's going on in this chapter and what is taking place on the cross of Christ we will never be the same. Seeing God on His knees, doing one of the most menial tasks a person can do for another person, should begin to change us. It should re-center us. A God on His knees makes us focus on Him and what He is doing. Instead of making us feel prideful because He's serving us, it actually leads us in the direction of greater humility. God is on His knees doing for these men

what they would not do for one another. God is on His knees right now before you and me and is ready to wash our feet, to cleanse us from all the things we have done wrong, to forgive us, to heal us. We only meet the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ on His knees...or we don't really meet Him at all. If you can't see God on His knees in Jesus Christ, you will never begin to understand who God actually is.

That's what Jesus is trying to get Peter to understand. Peter sees Jesus stripped to a loincloth, with a basin and a towel offering to wash his feet. Peter says, "No way! What are you doing? You're never going to wash my feet. That's not what leaders do!" Peter will not allow Jesus to wash his feet and Jesus is not going to wash Peter's feet against his will. Jesus simply tells Peter that if he wants to be with Him, then he must allow Jesus to wash his feet. He's not going to violate Peter's freedom and He's not going to violate your's or mine. We can keep our feet tucked up underneath our bodies. We can try to convince ourselves that we don't need to have our feet cleaned or that we can do it ourselves. We can try to hide all the stuff that's caked on our feet and that will be a tremendous loss to you and me, a loss beyond description. God is kneeling before us and is ready to make us clean.

Jesus' foot washing points beyond that menial task to what Jesus will do for the world on the cross. "If you don't let Me wash your feet you can't share in the life that I'm offering you." Unless Peter allows Jesus to cleanse him he has no hope of sharing in the Kingdom of God. Jesus will not wash Peter's feet by force. Peter needs to allow Jesus to do for him what he could not do for himself. St. Augustine once said that, "Proud humanity

would have died if a lowly God had not found him." Once Peter gets this clear he responds as we would expect Peter to respond. "Well, if that's what's at stake then don't stop with my feet. Wash my hands and head as well. Bring it on!"

That's paradigm shift number one. Our God, at the heart of who He is, is a servant. Here's big paradigm shift number 2. John chapter 13, verse 12.

John 13:12 *After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? **13** You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. **14** So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. **15** For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. **16** Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. **17** If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.*

Leslie Newbigin writes, "(Jesus) has laid aside His life for us all. And the debt which we owe to (Jesus) is to be discharged by our subjection to our neighbor in loving service. Our neighbor is the appointed agent authorized to receive what we owe to the Master."

Our neighbor is the appointed agent authorized to receive what we owe to Jesus for all that He has done and is doing for us. I get to wash Jesus' feet by washing the feet of my neighbor, by forgiving the person who hurt me, investing sacrificially to bless the life of someone else, by serving someone else for their benefit.

That is what glory looks like from God's perspective.

Think about the group of men He had in that room around that table. He had Matthew a tax collector, a man who had spent a good chunk of his life working as a sellout to the Romans; and He had Simon the Zealot who's life had been committed to driving the foreign oppressors from the land of Israel. Can you imagine Matthew the tax collector having his feet washed by Simon the Zealot? That's like expecting a Tutsi in Rwanda to wash the feet of a Hutu in 1994 or Syrian refugee washing the feet of the ISIS fighter. That all seems impossible, naïve, a fantasy, until we see the God of the universe on His knees washing the feet of His disciples.

What Jesus does after this last supper, and what He does for the world on the cross, turns the world upside down. It subverts the normal way the world operates and thus makes room for God to come and change everything.

When we kneel to wash our neighbor's feet we discover that Jesus is already there, washing our neighbor's feet. He's already washing our neighbor's feet, our spouse's feet, our boss' feet, our roommate's feet. He's already there and He says to us, "Come and join Me."

The most any world religion had ever said to its follows was that we are to love our neighbor the way we want to be loved. Love your neighbor as you love yourself. If we did even that, the world would be a completely different place. If we have food, we should make sure our neighbor has food. If we've got clean water to drink, make sure our neighbor has access to clean water. But Jesus calls us way beyond that. "Love your neighbor as I have loved you."

Did you notice that Judas, the one who betrayed Jesus, was around that table? Jesus knows someone is going to sell Him out and He knows who it is. And yet, Jesus serves Judas anyway. Jesus washes the feet of His enemy.

I love the story that John Ortberg tells to illustrate the gracious coming of God to our world. He writes, "I KNEW SOMETHING of the upside and downside of glory. I grew up a Chicago Cubs fan in the late 1960s. Their entire infield made the all-star team one year. Randy Hundley, the catcher, was a personal favorite. One day the phone rang. A neighbor, a girl in my class at school, got my mother on the phone.

"Mrs. Ortberg, you'll never guess what. Randy Hundley is at my house! I told him John lives next door. He wants to come to your house. Wants to see John." Then something went terribly wrong. My mother did not know who Randy Hundley was. She thought he was some kid I went to school with, who wanted to come over and play. My mother said: "Johnny is at piano lessons. You'll have to tell Randy he can come over and play some other day."

Ortberg writes, "My mother was a pea-brain. When I got home, my mother told me somebody named Randy Hundley had been next door, had wanted to come over, and she told him maybe some other time. I wanted to call the social services people. Take my mother away.

"That afternoon I was in a deep depression. Around 5:00 there was a knock on the door. When I answered it, there stood Randy Hundley. Major league baseball player. All-star. I beheld his glory—the glory of a

professional catcher, full of power and a strong right arm. He had stopped by our neighbors' before a speaking engagement, which is when my friend called. After he had finished speaking, although he was a major leaguer with a busy life, he decided to make a stop before he went home to Chicago. He came all the way back to our neighborhood. He tracked down my house. He knocked on my door. 'I didn't want you to take it out on your piano teacher,' he said. He encouraged me to keep following Christ. He gave me an autographed baseball. (Which my mother seems to have thrown away.)"

"To a ten-year-old kid, the glory of Randy Hundley wasn't that he had a Howitzer for an arm. It wasn't that he caught Ferguson Jenkins and Kenny Holtzman, or that he hit long home runs off Bob Gibson and Nolan Ryan. Glory was that someone as important as he was would take the time to come to the home of a little kid. Glory was that one day he laid aside his glove and bat and came knocking on my door. One day, he came just for me."

"Do you know what I have done to you?" That's the question Jesus asked His first disciples. It's the question He asks you and me right now. I'm only beginning to comprehend it. As I see God, on His knees, offering to wash my feet, I'm beginning to understand what He has done to me and I'm beginning to understand who He wants to make me to be.

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Note: The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request it by visiting: fpchkoolau@gmail.com