

To God Be the Glory

John 13:31-35 (NIV)

³¹ When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. ³³ "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. ³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once." (verses 31-32) Glorify. Glorify. Glorify. I hear that word and all I can think of is Fanny Crosby's hymn, number 399 in our hymnal: "To God be the glory; great things he has done! He so loved the world that he gave us his Son, who yielded his life an atonement for sin and opened the lifegate that all my go in. Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Let the earth hear his voice! Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Let the people rejoice! Oh, come to the Father through Jesus the Son and give him the glory – great things he has done!" (CW 399) That's how and why we glorify God: we sing praises to his name and declare what he has done. That's one of the reasons, one of the main reasons, we gather at church Sunday after Sunday. Outside of church, though, the word "glorify" is not really used in casual conversation. Maybe in the context of something like those mature video games or rated "R" action movies glorify violence. They praise it, make it look like it's a good, worthy thing that's happening.

Even though we may not use the actual word "glorify" often in casual conversation, we do glorify people and things. We glorify humanitarians, the do-gooders of the world, those people who improve our society or, at the very least, promote ideas that would improve life and society. We glorify sports figures, calling them heroes, greats, all-stars, legends. And honestly, there's a little narcissist in all of us who takes pride in what we accomplish and want to tell others about our great work so that we can get the credit. Even the most humble of us still want a little acknowledgement for what we have done.

When Jesus says, "Now the Son of Man is glorified," he is saying this in a setting that is kind of the opposite of a situation to be glorified. He said these words on Maundy Thursday evening. Just before Jesus and his disciples started their Passover feast, he got up, wrapped a towel around his waist, poured water into a basin, and began to wash his disciples' feet. This job was above him. Washing people's feet was reserved for the lowliest of the low servant, the one that you didn't trust anything else to because you were afraid that they might mess up.

Peter tried to refuse Jesus' servant work saying, "You shall never wash my feet." He knew that Jesus was above this. Jesus was his Lord, his Savior, his God. He should not lower himself to such levels. You're better than this, Jesus. By the fact that neither Peter nor the other disciples were clamoring to take over washing everyone's feet, you can infer that they all thought they were better than this, better than stooping down to take a servant's duty.

Are you better than this? It's a question I raise to myself any time there is something that needs to be done that I don't want to do it. Clean the bathroom. Vacuum. Do the dishes. Mow the lawn. Clean up the yard. Take out the trash. Do I not want to do these things because I think others should do them for me, that I'm above these duties? Maybe I'm even more tempted to think this way about things around church, that I'm the pastor, I shouldn't have to take out the trash, mow the yard, set up tables and chairs, etc. Thankfully, I serve such a great congregation that often there are other people raising their hands to get these things done, to serve. Even with all your help, the temptation remains. Do I think that I am better, above getting down on my knees to serve others the way that Christ served his disciples?

Do you think you are above serving others? Does it make you cringe to think of yourself as a servant? Does the idea conjure pictures of you being a doormat, that I am of lower value than you if I serve you? Is your pride, your dignity causing you to turn up your nose at serving others because no one is allowed to look down on you? When we refuse to stoop down to serve others, we are saying that it is undignified for us to consider our place as being one of serving others. There is no glory in serving.

Yet Christ said after he stooped down and washed his disciples' feet, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." (verse 34) This is not a give someone a hug, a kiss, some roses, and a box of chocolates kind of love. The love that Jesus is talking about is a self-sacrificing, self-abasing kind of love, to treat others better than we may even treat ourselves. Our paradigm, our model, for showing love is what Christ did, to love one another by stooping down and doing things that we may think are beneath us so that we serve others.

Now, that doesn't mean that you should be a doormat and have people use you and your generosity and willingness to serve to encourage their bad habits or their laziness. What Jesus is calling us to do is to not look at ourselves more highly than we ought, that we would be willing to stoop down to do things that may very well be below us and do them. Do them because you love your Savior, not because you think you will earn anything by it, not because you think you will be rewarded for doing so, not so that you can take pride in being the bigger man. No, we stoop down and do things that are below us because that's what our God did for us, and we want to bring glory to his name.

Stooping down and washing the disciples' feet was not the only way that Jesus showed his love for his disciples that night. Jesus talks about being glorified "when he was gone." (verse 31) Who was that "he" that was gone? It was Judas Iscariot, the betrayer. Just before our verses today, Jesus had explicitly called out Judas as the one who was going to betray him, indicating him by giving him a piece of bread. Once Judas took the bread, Jesus told him, "What you are about to do, do quickly." (John 13:27)

The wheels were in motion. Judas had headed out to gather the Jews who wished to kill Jesus. That night Jesus would be betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. That morning he would stand trial. He would be condemned. He would be hung on a cross. He would die. That's why he said to his disciples that night, "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come." (verse 33) Jesus would have his honor and dignity stripped from him in this mock trial and unlawful execution. Hardly actions worthy of praise. Yet Jesus calls this a time when he would be glorified.

It was beneath Jesus to allow himself to be betrayed by one of his disciples. He's God. He knows all things. He knew that Judas would do this. He even pointed that out to Judas. As God, he could have stopped Judas at any point. When the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, he could have just walked right through them. When he forced them all to fall to the ground at the mention of his name, he could have left them all there paralyzed and frozen in place. It was beneath Jesus, the Son of God, to suffer. As God, at any point he could have turned off the pain receptors and enjoyed the view. The innocent Son of God could have chosen not to die, but instead he gave up his spirit into his Father's hands.

This was all beneath Jesus, but he did it so that we would be forgiven for all the times when we looked at opportunities to serve as being actions that are beneath us. He knew that because of our sinfulness we would never be able to fully complete his command of loving each other as he loved us. That's why he lowered himself to serve us, to be betrayed, to die. Because Jesus did this, we come here to praise his name, to give him honor, to dedicate our lives in service to him. In these ways, Jesus, God, is glorified.

Because Christ has loved us in this way to stoop down to serve us by giving all this up for us, this is why we want to follow his command to love one another as Christ loved us. Think about what this means in your marriage, that as husband or as wife there is nothing beneath you when it comes to serving your spouse, that when you do things that you may think are below you, that you shouldn't have to do, you are following Christ's pattern for you to love your spouse as Jesus loved you. Parents, you are above your children. God placed you in that position of authority, but when you stoop down to train your children in the way that they should go, when you serve them in tending to their needs, getting them breakfast, filling up their water bottles, taking time away from your tasks to dedicate that time to them, you are loving as Christ loved you. This is true also at the workplace. If you are the boss, supervisor, manager, superior, whatever, you will delegate responsibilities, but you won't give work because you are above that kind of thing. You may even get down in the trenches, so to speak, and show your employees that you are not above this work. You are serving them by leading them. If you are the employee, worker, subordinate, whatever, you will not groan at the tasks given you, but you will strive to complete them to the best of your ability because no job is beneath you. You remember how your Savior lowered himself for you, so you can lower yourself to serve others.

When we serve one another in these ways, when we are willing stoop to do things that normal people would say are beneath us, we are showing Jesus to others. We are wordlessly proclaiming the actions of our Savior. As Jesus said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (verse 35) We will stand out because we are not looking to show ourselves as better than others. Instead, we show ourselves as followers of Jesus, servants of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Having watched Jesus stoop down to wash his disciples' feet and be betrayed by one of his own to be crucified like a vile criminal all to save us from our sins, we realize what it means when Jesus tells us, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." (verse 34) By his stooping down, he is glorified as our Savior. We praise him for lowering himself to do these things, lowering himself to take away our sins. Knowing that he has forgiven us in this way, we in turn love as he loved us. We ditch our pride and our ego and stoop down to love one another as he loved us. In humble service to one another we glorify God. To God be the glory. Amen.