

## Hands of Humility

John 13:1-5, 12-17, 34-35 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> 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>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. <sup>34</sup> "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

It was customary in Jewish culture, in that dry, dusty Middle Eastern culture where everyone wore open toed sandals, that a servant would wash the guests' feet when they came in for a meal. Generally, it was the lowliest job that a servant could do, sometimes being reserved for the lowliest and most unskilled servant. On this night, as Jesus and his 12 disciples were enjoying the Passover feast, no one had done the foot washing.

"So [Jesus] got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 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." (verses 4-5) Jesus washed his disciples' feet, doing the lowliest servant's job.

Then he turns it into a teachable moment. "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. 'You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.'" (verses 12-15) Tonight, Jesus is primarily our example serving with his hands of humility.

Now, does that mean should we do a literal foot washing? Maybe, if that's your custom of showing respect and hospitality to someone and if it's not something really weird or inappropriate as if I set up a foot washing station for all of you as you entered church tonight. So, we're probably not going to do literal foot washings. Jesus' point is this: "Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him." (verse 16) Your Lord, your Teacher, your God, got down on his hands and knees and washed his disciples' feet. He did the work of the lowliest servant, the job no one wanted, the job most people thought that they were better than. Yet, he did it.

Are our hands serving with the same humility as Jesus? What jobs or work do we consider ourselves to be above doing? Is it washing the dishes? Taking out the trash? Scrubbing the toilets? Changing a diaper? Vacuuming? Cleaning up the yard? Do we look down on these things 1) because they're gross, 2) because I just don't want to do them? Do we know that these things need to get done and we silently absent ourselves from doing them thinking that someone else will get fed up with them first and do them before I do?

Maybe it's not the job that I consider myself above, but maybe it's that I'm not okay being a servant while others are filling the Teacher and Master roles. Am I really okay serving with hands of humility, like Jesus washing his disciples' feet, or do I want the recognition? Do I want to be the one with the title, the one in charge? Or is it not so much that I want those jobs or titles but that I want respect while I do the lowly job? And when we don't get it, do we mutter under our breath that those guys in charge need to spend a day doing what we do, that we should be in charge instead of them, that we know how to do things better, that people should listen to me as the teacher and the master and not those idiots? Does this lead me to withhold service to others because I'm not being served with the respect and acknowledgement that I think that I should be? Am I really serving with hands of humility?

Or maybe we're on the reverse side of this. Maybe we don't want anyone serving us in humility because I don't want them to be inconvenienced. Maybe we don't want them serving us because then I will feel as if I owe them, that there will always be this debt hanging over our relationship. Maybe I do have too much pride, that since I can do this, and how dare they presume that I can't by doing things that I can do myself.

Looking at Jesus' hands of humility on this Thursday night, we see that there was no job beneath him. Every job, no matter his personal qualifications, was worth doing in order to serve someone else. He did not sigh heavily as he got up to put the towel around his waist, muttering that his disciples were lazy bumps on a log, not willing to lift their hands to serve their Teacher and Master. He did not call out Peter or James or John that they should have really stepped up to do this. Instead, he humbly served all 12, and that includes Judas Iscariot, the one who had already made arrangements to betray him and send him along to his crucifixion. Jesus showed his love and his character by not saying how he should be served but loving by his humble service – to those who should have been serving him, to those who even plotted against him.

Jesus is our example of how to use hands of humility. He said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (verses 34-35) Are we known by our hands of humility being used to serve others out of love, even those who should be serving us, even those who are our enemies?

Hopefully we are. But we also know our hearts. We know when we have grumbled and complained when we have been the servants. We know when we have sat with hands folded on my lap waiting for others to serve me because that's what I deserved. Even in the midst of serving, I have thought that this is beneath me. Someone else should be doing this. My hands have often not been hands of humble service. I know that I have failed to follow Jesus' example. My hands were not good enough, no matter how much I tried. The fix is not found in trying harder; it's found in the fact that Christ did serve with hands of humility for me, in my place. His work is substituted for mine. He did the service that I did not do. That makes my hands, your hands, perfect hands of humility.

Since Jesus already accomplished what we could not with his humble hands of service, now we have opportunities to live a life of gratitude to our perfectly humble substitute by looking at what our hands of humility can do for someone else, to be known as Jesus' disciples by loving others.

It is a wonderful thing, a praiseworthy thing, to see the hands of humility at work among our people. This past January, our national church body had me fill out a statistical report with a couple of new questions that they haven't asked in years previous. One of the new questions that caught my eye was asking how many people in some form or capacity serve voluntarily in our congregation. It's some 40 people, and I'm probably missing some. It was a nice reminder to know that this church is not just a pastor. It's not just a council or board of elders. This church is a group of believers, of people bannin' together around the Word of God and using our hands of humility in service to our God and to others. We maybe serve in many functions, doing many things for the body of Christ, things we mentioned with hands of praise on Palm Sunday. We maybe serve in just one. But whatever we do – whether we think it's big or small – we're serving with hands of humility, just like Jesus. By our service, we are loving as Christ loved us. This is how people know we belong to Christ.

As we serve others with hands of humility like Jesus, we also have to be realistic in terms of our physical limitations. There may be things that we want to do, but that we aren't able to do. To say it in another way, we can't do everything. Nor should we. We aren't God. We're people. We're limited. We all need rest. That's why we need all of us doing so many different things. We serve in the places where God has put us. We serve with the talents that God has given us. We learn new skills to serve in ways that we hadn't considered before. We serve with the time God has made available to us. And sometimes we allow ourselves to be served because that allows someone else to use their hands in humility, an opportunity for them to show that we are Christ's disciples, loving as he loved us. "Now that you know these things," Jesus says, "you will be blessed if you do them." (verse 17)

Because Christ first served us, served with perfect hands of humility as he washed his disciples' feet and then put his perfection on us so that we have pure hands, we follow his example. We look for ways that we can use our hands in humble service to others, to be willing to do the jobs that others don't want to do, to realize the blessings and joys of loving as our God loved us. Because he first served us, we serve others with hands of humility. Amen.