**“Are you going to wash my feet?” – John 13:1-17**

**Intro**

“Don’t judge a book by its cover.” “Beauty is only skin deep.” “All that glitters is not gold.” Each of these well known idioms / are all intended to remind us that appearances can be deceiving; that we should be careful of making judgments based solely on observation. There are cases, of course, where we can make pretty good judgments based on what we observe. I don’t know many of us who are fooled / for instance/ by looking up at the menu board and seeing McDonalds “healthy” menu options.

But for every *one* time where our observations *do* lead us to a correct assessment, there are easily another 9 times where our initial assessment /of someone or something/ is completely wrong. And you don’t even have to be good at math to know that means we’re wrong about 90% of the time!

Like at VBS growing up, I remember having this guy come in one time and teaching a bible story with a line drawing – do you remember this? And he drew this little line on the white board as he started talking and was adding these other little lines here and there. And 20 seconds in, my 10 year old brain is already thinking, “This guy is an idiot; look at this: he’s a terrible artist and probably has nothing good to say either.” *Only to see,* 10 minutes later, that both the drawing he’d created /as well as the bible lesson he taught /we’re both exceptional.

Or if you’ve ever watched a sculptor dig in to a fresh piece of marble, you might initially conclude that this guy is about as good a sculptor as Wreck it Ralph// only to see in the days in weeks to come that there was a method and purpose to what appeared – at first - to be careless strokes. I remember hearing a story told of the famous artist Michelangelo: that someone asked him once how he had created his beautiful sculpture, David, from a hunk of marble // and he is said to have replied, “It’s simple. I just chip away everything that doesn’t look like David.”

In both those cases - and a thousand others like them - the actions of teachers or artists; of people in general or of God in particular// they can seem brash and pointless to us from our perspective. And yet, given time – or in altering our perspective – we very often see that our initial assessments were actually wrong.

Well, in our passage this morning, we’re going to see that things were actually no different 2000 years ago, and that Jesus’ disciples had the same proclivity for making judgments based on appearances alone, that we do today. And, just like us, they were mostly dead wrong then too. And here in John 13, as Jesus draws these seemingly random “lines” and delivers these seemingly misplaced “blows” to the marble, Peter in particular, leaps to a wrong conclusion of Jesus’ actions; not understanding that Jesus’ washing of His disciples’ feet is, really, an acted parable of what He is about to accomplish on the cross.

And there’s a great deal for us to learn here from Jesus’ response to Peter’s question “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” /particularly if you’ve ever struggled to understand the actions of God in your own life, or, if you’re wanting to grow in your understanding of what it really means to follow Jesus.

Each Sunday, we’ve been looking at a question that Jesus was asked and then talking about how the way He responds to those questions / reveals more about who He is. Today, in our last message in this series that we’ve called “Questioning Jesus”, we’re actually going to see Jesus revealed in three different ways as we look through this passage in John 13. We’re going to see Jesus revealed as the **Servant of all,** the **Atoning Sacrifice for all**, and then finally, as the **Example for all.** (x2)

So, if you’ve closed your bibles, please open them again to John 21 and we’ll get after this together.

Ok, so let’s begin by looking at:

1. **Jesus as the Servant of all – vs. 1-5**

Our passage begins here in vs. 1 by telling us – look with me at there – that **(READ vs. 1).** Now, the Passover feast was a very significant time in the Jewish calendar b/c it was a yearly celebration where the Jews remembered how God had saved them out of slavery in the land of Egypt. We read the account of this in Exodus 15 where God had sent a series of plagues on Egypt then Pharaoh had refused to let the people of Israel go; the final one being the sending of the angel of death /who would come through the land and kill the first born son of everyone in Egypt, including the livestock. But, God had provided a way for the people of Israel to escape this plague of death, by killing a lamb and putting its blood on the doorposts of their homes; so that when the angel of death passed through Egypt, he would see the blood of the lamb and, literally, pass over/pass by, their homes and spare their sons. It was this same night that Pharaoh released the people of Israel from slavery.

So this was what was being celebrated in this yearly feast that Jesus and His disciples were now about to eat. Theologian D. A. Carson notes that in telling us that this all took place “just before the Passover feast”, John is telling us chronologically when these events took place, but, he’s also commenting theologically on the thematic significance of what Jesus is about to do; that Jesus’ actions are directly related to the meaning of the Passover.

If you look with me at vs. 2 now, we read **(READ vs. 2a).** All through Jesus’ ministry, He has been referring to his “time”, or in some of your translations, He calls it His “hour”. And each time He refers to this time/hour, He tells people that it hasn’t come yet. Now here in vs. 2 /we see that it has come; in fact just before our passage in John 12:23, Jesus literally says, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” So, this means that everything that happens now will be included in what Jesus was referring to by the expression “my time/hour.” So let’s see what that includes.

If you look in vs. 3 now we read **(READ vs. 3-5)** That transition between vs 3 and 4 ought to just stagger us in the enormity of the contrast John makes there. Look at it again. John tells us, Jesus knew that He had all power and authority from God and, basically, that He was God, ***so*** He took off His outer garments and did the job of the lowest of slaves in washing His disciple’s feet … like … huh? I mean this was a job – historians tell us - that was so low /that if a home had Jewish slaves in it, it was deemed even too low for them to do and it should be done by a Gentile slave. And yet John tells us here that – almost as a matter of consequence – it was *because* Jesus knew that He had all power and authority that He did this. Now that’s significant and is exactly what I was referring to last week about the way that God uses His rightful power and authority to serve His creation.

So here we see the disciple’s Teacher and Master /as well as God in human flesh / taking off His outer robe, dressing in the clothes of a slave, and then serving His disciples by washing their feet.

**App**

Now there are a tonne of things already we could say about these verses alone; really, this section could be a whole sermon by itself. But, for your purposes this morning, what I want you to see here is that Jesus is the **Servant of *all*.** Now, why is that important? Well, it’s extremely important b/c, look at what John says in vs. 2. He says **(READ vs. 2).** You know what that means? That means that Jesus’ betrayer – Judas Iscariot; the man who was about to sell out Jesus to the people that wanted kill him - was *there* at this Passover meal! It also means that Jesus also washed Judas’ feet /along with all the other disciples.

Have you ever been betrayed before by someone you trusted? Now, of course, Jesus knows that Judas is going to betray Him// but, really, that makes this whole scene even more remarkable. If you *knew* ahead of time that someone was about to stab you in the back, how would you be relating to them? You’d probably be doing everything you could to protect yourself from them right? Definitely not trying to serve them!

But that is the prodigal way God serves His creation. B/c – remember – all of humanity has turned their backs on God and tried to be their own lord and master – that’s what Romans 3 tells us. And yet, the message of the gospel is that Jesus came to serve a *whole world* that was in rebellion to Him; He came to serve the betrayers and the rebels of the world, and to pay the cost we could never pay ourselves in His death on the cross.

So, even though it *is* surprising for us to read that Jesus invited His betrayer to eat with Him, and that He even served him in this incredibly humble way by washing his feet //// it shouldn’t *really* be surprising to us at all, should it? No, what is really surprising // is that He does that for any of us!

So that’s Jesus as the **Servant of all**. Again, there’s lots more that we could say but I think that in itself is plenty to chew on. Next, I want us to look at:

1. **Jesus as the Atoning Sacrifice for all – vs. 6-11**

Now, if any of that language is unfamiliar to you: to “atone” for something simply means to pay for something in full or to reconcile something. And so when we talk about Jesus being an atoning sacrifice we just mean that when Jesus died on the cross, He paid the debt in full that we owed b/c of our sin.

We’ll see this here in vss. 6-11 which is actually the part of our passage where we find Peter’s question to Jesus.

So Jesus is going around washing each of the disciple’s feet, and He gets to Peter, and Peter says – look with me at vs. 6 **(READ vs. 6).** Now, we can’t read the tone/emphasis in our English translations, but in the Greek, the strong emphasis of Peter’s question is on the word “my” – “Lord, are you going to wash ***my*** feet?” And, more than a question, it really has the sense of a rebuke. We can see this as well b/c in verse 8 – even after Jesus has told Peter plainly that he doesn’t understand what He’s doing – Peter still tells Jesus – look with me **(READ vs. 8).**

Now, aside from the obvious, you would think by now that Peter would have realized that challenging Jesus was a really dumb thing to do. Along with watching the Scribes and the Pharisees – guys way smarter then him – get schooled by Jesus day after day, it’s amazing to me that Peter would forget how, not even that long ago, he had tried to rebuke Jesus when He had told the disciples that He was going to be handed over to the chief priests and elders and that they were going to put Him to death. And Peter had been all, “*Oh* no! Uh uh. No way Jesus. There’s no way that’s gonna happen to you!” And then Jesus had called him Satan. I mean, I don’t know about you, but I think I would remember a time that Jesus had called me Satan – maybe that’s just me.

But – of course – in both these instances, Peter’s motivation is good and he really is trying to help Jesus out. But, after calling him Satan in Matthew’s account of that conversation, Jesus says to Peter, that he’s wrong b/c his perspective on things is wrong; he’s wrong b/c he has in mind the things of men and not of God. Same thing in our passage. Look at verse 7 with me. After Peter’s protest/question, Jesus says **(READ vs. 7).**

This is actually a verse that – all by itself – has had a great impact in my own life. I always liked it in the old KJV which says it, “What I do now thou knowest not, but thou shalt know herafter.” In some of the darkest times in my past – even as I was agonizing over God’s providence in my life – I found a tremendous amount of hope from this verse.

B/c you see, what Jesus is trying to do for Peter now (and for all the disciples really) is to tie together what He’s doing here in washing their feet /with the Passover feast; and even more specifically, with the way He is about to live out the Passover /as the Lamb who will be slaughtered to rescue His people from death. And so Jesus is saying, “Just wait Peter. Just wait, child that I love. I *know* this doesn’t make sense to you right now. But when you see how this all works out in the end /// *then* you’ll understand what I was doing here. For the moment //I just want you to trust Me that I know what I’m doing.”

**App #1**

And I don’t know where you’re at in your own life this morning. But I know that some of you here this morning need to be reminded of this; need to find hope again in this. I know I do. All the time I need to be reminded that – no matter how dark the tunnel; no matter how bitter the cup – *God knows what He’s doing*. And my finite, human perspective on things is never gonna be sufficient to see all that God sees / and to understand things like He does. And so, particularly when we’re going through those dark tunnels in life, we need to always seek to interpret those events in light of what we know about the character of God. Pretty much anything else is going to lead us into error.

But along with this we need to see the other way Jesus responds to Peter’s question. Look at the second half of verse 8 with me. After full on telling Jesus, “No! Fuhgedaboudit. You are never going to wash my feet!” Jesus says this **(READ vs. 8b)**.

Now this is where we start to see more clearly /that there is much more than foot washing going on here. B/c – what? Is Jesus really telling Peter if he doesn’t let Him wash his feet then they’re not friends anymore; that’s he can’t come to Jesus’ birthday party anymore? No. This is where we see Jesus tying in - even more - the sacrificial language of the Passover, with *Himself* as the Passover Lamb and as **the Atoning Sacrifice for all.**

You see, in the Jewish sacrificial system, the killing of the lamb would be the thing that paid for the sin of the person bringing the offering to the temple. The lamb’s blood would be shed for their sins; it’s blood being spilled where theirs’ should’ve been spilled in *atoning* for (or again, *paying for*) their sin. And the blood would then be sprinkled on the altar as well as - at times – on the person, symbolically cleansing them from their guilt.

Now think about this: what did John the Baptist call Jesus when he saw Him walking towards him to be baptized? He said, “Behold! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.” And here’s the point: John was *absolutely* right. That’s *exactly* who Jesus was.

And so, in the second half of verse 8 in our passage here // what Jesus is saying to Peter is, basically, “Peter, I’m showing you by what I’m doing here, the *whole reason* I came to earth, viz. to humble Myself by taking on human flesh /and then// offering Myself as a sacrificial offering that will then cleanse all who believe in Me from their sin and guilt.”

*This* is what John was referring to in vs. 1 of our passage when he talks about Jesus showing the disciples – Jesus “own” – the full extent of His love. It wasn’t the washing of their feet that showed them this love, but what the washing of their feet/ *pointed to*!

The apostle Paul summarizes this so well in the second chapter of his letter to the Philippian church. Let me read for you what he says there **(READ Phil 2:5-8).**

**App**

Two things to see here quickly:

1. When Peter “thinks” he gets what Jesus is saying and says in **vs. 9** “well then wash all of me Jesus! I want to be sure I’m in with you.” We see from Jesus’ response in **vs. 10** that, when Jesus washes you, you are clean for all time; that when Jesus washes your sin, in God’s eyes you are clean and you are His for good.
2. But we also see in Jesus’ response in the second half of **vs. 8**, **the exclusivity of Christ**. Look again at what Jesus says there. “Unless ***I*** wash you, you have no part with Me.” So what that means for Peter, then, and for us today, is that there is no other “washing” and no other “payment” is ***ever*** going to be able to accomplish what Jesus’ washing does. Which means there is *no* other way that our sins can be washed and we can be restored back to a relationship with God /except /through Jesus’ death *alone*!

C. S. Lewis illustrated this powerfully in his book *The Silver Chair* which is part of his Chronicles of Narnia series. In these books, a Lion named Aslan is meant to represent Christ. And in one of His interactions with a girl named Jill, we read this:

“Are you not thirsty?" said the Lion. "I am dying of thirst," said Jill. "Then drink," said the Lion. "May I — could I — would you mind going away while I do?" said Jill. The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. And as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience. The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic. "Will you promise not to — do anything to me, if I do come?" said Jill. "I make no promise," said the Lion. Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer. "Do you eat girls?" she said. "I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms," said the Lion. It didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it. "I daren't come and drink," said Jill. "Then you will die of thirst," said the Lion. "Oh dear!" said Jill, coming another step nearer. "I suppose I must go and look for another stream then." "There is no other stream," said the Lion.”

So, we’ve seen Jesus as the **Servant of all** and now as the **Atoning Sacrifice for all.** The last thing we’ll look at this morning from our passage is:

1. **Jesus as the Example for all – vs. 12-17**

The last thing Jesus does in this training session of sorts, is to make this all very very personal; personal for the disciples as well as personal for us. Jesus puts His regular clothes back on and returns to His place at the table. And then he begins to teach the disciples based on what He’s just done. And one of the big implications that Jesus is drawing out here is that: He has not taken on the form of a servant and come to give of Himself sacrificially to accomplish our salvation **alone**, but also to give those who follow Him and example of how He wants us to live as well.

Look at vs. 13 ff. with me. Jesus says **(READ vs. 13-16).** Later, Peter will say something very similar in one of his own books of the bible, 1 Peter 2 when he talks about suffering in this life for doing what’s right. He says in **vs. 21** “*To this you were called, b/c Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps.*”

Now maybe – if you care about fairness and equality with the same fervor that my daughters do - you’d agree with Jesus and say, “Yes! That’s right! If the Teacher is willing to get His hands dirty and demonstrate what He wants His students to do, *of course* that means the students should be willing to do it too!”

But, anticipating this agreement, Jesus goes one step further in vs. 17 – look with me there. He says, **(READ vs. 17).** So what Jesus is saying here is, basically, “Right right right. I’m glad that you *“agree”* with Me that this is what you should do. That’s great. //// But that agreement /and that knowledge/ is ultimately *useless* unless you actually follow through and do it yourself.” Or as theologian Gerald Borchert said so well, “In the teaching of Jesus there is no division between head-understanding and life-practice.”

James, the brother of Jesus, said it another way in his own book of the bible. He said in James 1:22, “*Do not merely listen to the word* [and here, he means God’s word] *and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”*

**App**

And when it comes to actually obeying/living out what Jesus commands in our lives, Christians are a funny bunch sometimes.

I remember one time a few years back, I had asked one of my daughters to clean up a bunch of costumes she had pulled out. And a short while later, I remember my daughter came out to me and very proudly announced, “Daddy, I made my bed!” And then, I remember her actually being offended when I pointed out to her the fact that I hadn’t asked her to make her bed, I’d asked her to clean up her costumes.

And we can be a lot like that as Christians too. Maybe God has asked you to forgive someone, and to offer them the same grace He’s extended to you, but you come to God and say, “Look God! I read my bible every day this week!” Or maybe God has called you to give up your comfortable Vancouver, west-side existence /and move your family to the DTES to serve there, or maybe even to go serve others overseas, but instead you come to God and say, “Check it out God: I volunteered to serve on the missions committee!” Or, I’m gong to be a small group leader!”

And in the last verse of our passage, Jesus is saying to His disciples, there, and to us here today, “I’ve called you to a specific act of obedience: just as I have humbled myself and served the world in a self-giving, sacrificial way, I’m calling you to do the same. And anything less than actual feet-on-the-ground obedience to what I’m calling you to, means that you haven’t actually understood yet what it is that I did for you.”

Now, yes and amen, what that obedience looks like might be different for every individual. Sure! But then I would ask you: what *does* it look like for you? What does it look like for you in your own life to humble yourself like this? What does it look like to serve the people God has placed in your path in this same kind of self-sacrificing way? How is Jesus calling you to follow His example today? If you’re like me, you likely already know what that thing is. And then I would simply ask you: are you being obedient? Are you doing that thing? B/c – yes - obedience to God in general is good / but not when He’s called you to something specific. If He’s called you to something specific / and you’re trying to mask your **dis**obedience to that thing with obedience in general, you should know – like with my daughter making her bed instead of cleaning up costumes – God is not fooled.

Remember the servant is not above his master; a messenger is not greater than the one who sent him. God isn’t calling you to anything that He hasn’t already demonstrated Himself. And I guarantee you, whatever He’s calling you to in your own life /is infinitely less then the demonstration He’s already given us in Jesus.

**Conclusion**

Jesus was right. There was no way Peter – in that moment as Jesus knelt at his feet waiting to wash them – could’ve understood all of what was meant by Jesus actions. All Peter could do in that moment was to trust in what he knew about Jesus, even as he struggled to comprehend what Jesus was asking him to do.

And it is no different for you and I today. We read in Isaiah 55, “*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher then the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”* And yet, how often does God call us to a difficult obedience; or to a long, seemingly fruitless obedience; and we begin to doubt that that is true - that God really *does* know what He’s doing up there? We so quickly want to assume, when the *way* God calls us specifically to follow Jesus’ Example is:

* To humbly serve an unbelieving spouse
* Or to sacrificially raise a special-needs child
* To humbly follow a career path that is beneath our qualifications
* Or to sacrificially give of time that we want to use elsewhere

We want to assume that maybe God’s “high thoughts” are really not all that high. Or maybe – more crassly – we think that perhaps Isaiah 55 is referring to THC intoxication? If we’re honest, there are times when life can sure seem like that.

But, remember what we said as we started out this morning: what seem like random “lines” and senseless “hammer blows” from God to us //only *look* that way b/c we don’t have the same perspective that He does. And as we learn to trust in what we know about the character of God – that He is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love – I’ve found /very often /that God begins to shift my perspective; and at least that I no longer feel so angry or afraid or whatever. And even if I don’t understand all (or even a little bit) of what He’s doing, I can still trust that there *is* / *purpose* behind His hammer blows.

Romans 8 tells us that God saves us in order to conform us into the image of Christ; to make us look more like Him with each thing He allows into our lives; **that’s** the purpose behind the hammer blows // *every* time that’s the purpose.

And so – in the same way that Michelangelo simply chipped away everything that didn’t look like David in order to make his famous statue – maybe the difficult ways God is calling you to follow Jesus Example, are really just Him chipping away at all the places in your life that don’t look like Jesus.

May God grant each one of us a change in our perspective today.

Let’s pray.