Foot Washing?

John 13:12

“Really.....Jesus washed their feet? I don’t understand”. “What, you do foot washing at your church? That’s weird”. These are common comments from people who may not understand the significance of John’s description of Jesus washing the disciple’s feet at the Last Supper. Our scripture today starts in the first verse of John 13. If you would allow me the freedom to share my impressions of Jesus washing their feet, please.

John shares with us that once the meal had ended, Jesus rose from supper, took a towel and girded himself (wrapped the towel around himself). He then took a pitcher of water and a basin (bowl) and began to wash the disciple’s feet. From what I understand, he didn’t miss one. Peter had a concern about the Lord washing his feet, as we see in their conversation in verses 6-10.

Jesus then asks the question in our focal passage today. “Know ye what I have done to you?” I imagine the room was so silent you could hear a pin drop. The disciples did not know what to say. So, don’t feel too bad if you just don’t understand the whole deal about foot washing. Jesus then tells them exactly what he had done. He had given them an example to follow. You see, Jesus knew what the future held for this group of twelve disciples. He knew the pain, hardship and other challenges these twelve were to face; not just in the next 24 hours, but for the rest of their natural lives. Jesus gave them a wonderful example of what I call Servant Leadership.

Jesus tells them that if their Lord and Master has washed their feet, then they should wash one another’s feet. They are to serve and support each other. Jesus then tells them that he had given them an example that they should do as He had done for them. The act of washing feet is a task left for the lowest in the household, the servant or slave. Jesus reminds them that they must remain humble on their journey, never allowing their pride to steer them off course. “The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him”, is the way Jesus put it.

What does that mean for us? Well, I believe Jesus taught the twelve a simple but very challenging lesson. We have a mission. The mission is about sharing the gospel to a lost world in whatever way the Lord has asked us to. It’s so easy for us to make the work (and success) all about us. That’s not what Jesus wants, and this is the main point he was making here. It’s not about us……what’s the mission?

So, you see, to me, the foot washing service is all about reminding ourselves about our mission. It’s about remembering that we must be humble servants who are inspired by the mission our Lord and Savior has given us. It reminds us to support our fellow disciples and let them know how much we appreciate their support at the same time.

If you have never participated in a foot washing service, I would encourage you to do so. It’s not about cleaning dirty feet (most folks clean their toes extra special for the service!). It’s about reminding ourselves of Christ’s example of being a humble servant leader.

By the way, our church has foot washing service and communion the fourth Sunday in April and October. I encourage you to join us.