

Rev. Gregory Gibbons
Lola Park Lutheran Church
Redford, MI 48239

John 13:1-15

JESUS, PETER, AND ME: IT'S ALL ABOUT CLEANSING

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Two of our favorite days of the year are usually Christmas and our birthday. Two of the favorite days of our life were graduation from high school and our wedding day. The reason is very simple. We got gifts and we like to get gifts. I have encountered very few people in my lifetime who did not like to receive gifts.

God is the ultimate giver and Jesus delivers God's gifts. Those gifts come not because we have earned or deserved them, but because God is love. We will focus on the gifts that Christ gives us throughout these three days. Tonight, we will focus on the love Jesus had for us and the love that he wants us to show to one another. Jesus is going to wash his disciples' feet, an act that points to a deeper cleansing, a cleansing that goes all the way to the heart. This is God's gift. JESUS, PETER, AND ME: IT'S ALL ABOUT CLEANSING

"It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own that were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love." Everything was now ready. Everything had been building up to this point since the creation of the world and the fall into sin. God promised that he would send a savior who would crush the head of Satan, destroy the power of death forever, and take away the sin of the world. Jesus was going to die. He knew that and the apostles knew that as well. At least they should have. They knew the opposition from the chief priests, Pharisees, and teachers of the law. They knew that these people wanted to kill Jesus. This was no secret. Jesus had also told them many times that he would have to go to Jerusalem to suffer, to die, and to rise again. But perhaps they had forgotten that because of the great reception they had gotten as they come to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

Jesus was going to leave this world and return to the Father. The victory would be his and the victory would be ours. Jesus knew what had to be done and he would carry it out completely according to his Father's will. We can't even begin to imagine the pain that he would have to endure on Good Friday in both body and soul. He would experience the physical pains of being beaten, whipped, and crucified. He would experience the emotional pains of being betrayed by one of his disciples, denied by another, and forsaken by the rest. And we can only marvel at his willingness to take the sin and the guilt of every man, woman, and child in history upon himself and endure God's judgment upon that sin. He would show the apostles the full extent of his love.

So often we want to think that life is all about me. There was a commercial a few years back with Jan Lynch saying, "Recently, I discovered that I am the center of the universe." It really isn't all that funny when it comes down to it. You've been there, haven't you? You want your own way, all the time. You will do whatever you have to do to get your way. Even as a baby, you knew when to turn on the tears to get what you wanted, and if your parents didn't get it right away, you just cried a little harder.

We are in the Upper Room where Jesus is going to celebrate the Passover meal with his disciples. He is not merely going to celebrate it; he is going to fulfill it. He is going to be the Passover lamb who was slain for the sin of the world. He is going to take some of the elements of the Passover meal and give his last will and testament. He will give his very body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. His disciples would celebrate this special supper until he returns again in glory.

Now it was customary when people had a meal that a servant would be there to wash the dusty feet of the people who were the guests at that meal. It certainly wasn't a difficult task. You could say that anyone could do it. That's the key phrase: anyone could do it. There was one catch. There was a container filled with water, a basin, and towels. But here was no servant. Who was going to wash the feet of the other disciples? You can hear the Jeopardy music playing in the background. You can feel the tension. They look around the room. James, John, Andrew, Matthew, Thomas, Philip, Bartholomew, Simon, Thaddeus. Who is going to do it? Each one of them had a good reason why he isn't going to do it. Each one of them is getting more and more upset. Someone should be washing my feet. Why doesn't someone get up off his fat butt and do it?

They wait for what seems like an eternity. Only one person is getting up. He is taking off his outer clothing. He is wrapping a towel around his waist. He is pouring the water into the basin, and he is washing everyone's feet. And it's Jesus! We know that somewhere that evening a dispute had arisen among them as to which of them was considered to be the greatest. That was not the first time. Sadly, the apostles sinfully showed their selfishness and envy for the highest positions in Jesus' kingdom wherever that might be. Thoughts of humility never entered their minds. They were too consumed with ideas of greatness in and for themselves.

I would imagine that at this point everyone was feeling very uneasy. They may have disagreed as to which of them was the greatest, but none of them (with the exception of Judas) had any doubt that Jesus was greater than any of them. They sat there with mouths agape as Jesus washed the feet of each of them, one by one.

Now many of the disciples seemed lost for words. There are a number of them that we do not have a single word that they ever said recorded in any book of the New Testament. Peter was not one of them. Peter always had something to say. "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replies, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No, you shall never wash my feet!"

Peter, in effect, says to Jesus, "I don't want your gift." We don't know exactly what was in the mind and heart of Peter. This didn't seem right. Perhaps it was a mixture of reverence for Jesus and an element of self-will. In any case, Peter said "no" to Jesus' gift.

Do you say "no" to God's gifts? Sadly, we do all too often. Our sinful, selfish Old Adam speaks his mind. We may say the words, "Thy will be done! But we really don't mean it. We want to say, "My will be done!" We want God to answer our prayers when we want and how we want. We may be going through some trial, some illness, some testing. God promises to give us the strength and patience to bear up under the situation, but we don't want that. We want immediate relief or deliverance, and we will grumble and complain that God isn't really listening to us. We feel very comfortable with some of our sins. They fit us like an old shoe. We like our gossip, our lusts, our evil desires. We don't want to hear words like "repent" or sacrifice". We don't want to take the time to pray today. We might take a vacation from Word and Sacrament for awhile and think nothing of it. Something else is more important. All these are ways of saying, "God, I don't want your gifts."

"Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." Peter will start to understand. Jesus is teaching his disciples a lesson in humility. Sin shows itself in our lives every day. The actions of the apostles showed their selfishness and lack of love for one another. And of course, Peter, known for his roller coaster rides of the highest highs and the lowest lows, now goes overboard in the opposite direction. He's now ready for an entire bath. He sees his need for cleansing, not only from the dust of his feet, but also from the filth of sin clinging to his heart and soul. The foot washing was a symbol of Jesus' humility. He was the Father's servant, who would lay aside all his power and authority and humble himself unto death, even death on a cross.

Did you note who was also there that evening? All twelve were there but only Peter and Judas were mentioned by name. Both would do horrible things that evening, but Judas never received the deeper cleansing that

Jesus was offering. His feet were washed but “the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus.”

As we see the love that Jesus had for us, may we see how easy it is to fall in Satan’s trap. We take sin much too lightly. We do not see the evil great. Judas started with a little greed that grew into dishonesty. He dipped into the treasury. He could use a couple of extra bucks. I’m sure that he justified it in some way in his own mind. Satan would use that greed, that love of money, to prompt Judas to betray Jesus. Then after Judas had done the dirty deed, Satan convinced Judas that he could never be forgiven. Judas went out and hanged himself. Sin had formed a callous over Judas’ soul.

“Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” Jesus has washed you in the waters of Holy Baptism. He called you by name and brought you into his family. Do you think of your baptism often? Do you think of it daily? Every day we are contaminated by the filth of sin. Every day the world continues to influence us in so many ways and they aren’t good influences. Every day we need to drown our Old Adam with all his evil deeds and desires and let our new man arise.

Christ washes us clean in many ways. He does it through his Word as we hear and read what he has done. This weekend is the very heart and core of our faith. We see the full extent of Jesus’ love as he stretches out his arms on the cross and bows his head in victory having paid for the sin and guilt of the world. We see his triumph as the tomb is found empty because he has risen from the dead exactly as he promised.

And now we have the opportunity to come to the Lord’s table and receive his very body and blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. He offers this gift to you free of charge. To eat and drink the Lord’s Supper is to have a part with him now.

Jesus calls us to humble and loving service to one another. He gives us spouses, parents, children, brothers, sisters, neighbors, friends, enemies, Christians, unbelievers, and the whole world as our field. Our motivation: “We love because he first loved us.” We thank him for his gifts of humility, forgiveness, and love.

This is the story of Jesus, Peter, and each of us. AMEN.