

Sermon- 10-18-2015

Text- John 13:1-17

Title- Giving Freely (Reflect)

Before my message today I have some family business to address for those of you who call Harbor home- or even if you don't. Many of you have no doubt been wondering how we are going to replace Jed on staff. Are we hiring a new lead pastor? Is there a plan?

Our staff, Ministry Directors & Elder teams met for our annual retreat over Columbus Day Weekend. After much prayer and discussion, we made some decisions about Harbor's future. In order to properly share these decisions, we have scheduled three "Family Meetings" next week (following Saturday evening service on Oct 24<sup>th</sup>, at 7pm on Wednesday, Oct 28<sup>th</sup>, & following second service on Sunday Nov 1<sup>st</sup>). We hope you'll choose to attend the meeting that best suits your schedule. This is an exciting time for our church community, and we're looking forward to what God has in store for us!

What's the worst job you've ever had? (Take two minutes and tell the person next to you.)

Most of us have had to work jobs we disliked. If the worst job you ever had is your current one, then I want you to leave here today and write up your resignation. Life's too short. On second thought, don't do that. It's not a bad thing to be gainfully employed. Sometimes we stick with jobs we dislike so that we can keep food on the table.

The worst job I've ever had helped me pay for college. It was working the nightshift as a welder for a company that made all the metal display racks for Walmart. That was a terrible job, but it didn't fit with the message I have for us today nearly as well as the second worst job I ever had. The second worst job I ever had was working three straight summers as the dishwasher at a youth camp. Six days a week for 8 straight weeks I washed every last dish and pan for 250 or so campers. To this day when I see a sink full of dirty dishes I flee in terror. You think I'm joking? Ask my wife.

Those were awful days. Being the dishwasher at camp is, by far, the lowest rung on the ladder of camp jobs. This particular camp served every meal on plastic trays- and every drink in plastic cups- and they all had to be washed. Which meant I had to rinse down all 250 trays and all 250 cups after every meal, and then I would stack them onto pallets and run them all through a commercial dishwasher. Rinsing off the trays and cups was a tedious job, but that was a piece of cake compared to the pots and pans. Piles and piles of pots and pans that all had to be washed by hand- I wish I could erase the memory from my mind.

I had an arsenal of scouring pads, sponges, sprayers, and even stainless steel scrubbers, but those pots and pans refused to release the residue of each meal without a fight. Oh the horror of 30 trays of burnt pizza crust, cheese and tomato sauce; the calamity of dried sloppy-joe mixing pots; the sheer terror of caked-on spaghetti sauce pans! Hours after everyone else had left the cafeteria I would crawl out of the kitchen- the skin on my hands looking like white prunes, my shirt and shorts soaked- exhausted and yet fully aware that the next mealtime was coming, and with it, more pots and pans.

I still remember the worst dishes I ever had to face. The camp cook, in her wisdom, had prepared two giant pots of sausage gravy one morning so she could serve the campers biscuits and gravy- only she had neglected to stir the pots well. The bottom of each pot scorched. They were burned black a good half inch thick. I let them soak in dish soap while I did the rest of the pots and pans from breakfast, but it didn't ease the hold of that black tar. I scrubbed and I scoured until my hands could barely hold the scouring pad. The blackness remained. The crew came in to prepare and serve lunch and I was still working on the first of the two pots. When I finally finished it, the trays and cups from lunch were starting to pile up and I still had that second scorched pot standing in the sink basin waiting for me.

I finished all the dishes and pans from lunch and decided that I was too tired to tackle the second pot- it would have to wait. I left it soaking in dish soap and dreaded the fact that it would be waiting for me when I returned. But when I came back to the kitchen that evening the pot was gone. I hunted for it and found it clean and pristine on it's shelf. Someone had taken mercy on me. I never learned who it was, but someone took pity on the lowly dishwasher that afternoon and scrubbed that scorched pot clean for me. I can't tell you how much that meant to me.

When your job stinks- when it's the lowliest, most thankless and difficult position- and someone steps in to help, the sense of relief that brings is hard to describe. It's such a gift. It eases a burden while simultaneously validating and showing respect for the challenging role that you're trying to fulfill. But instances like this are rare, right? This seldom happens. People just don't help each other out like this very often. Who does this? Who gives freely like this?

Turn with me in your Bibles to John's gospel in chapter 13.

*1 Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end. 2 It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God.*

*4 So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, 5 and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.*

*6 When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"*

*7 Jesus replied, "You don't understand now what I am doing, but someday you will."*

*8 "No," Peter protested, "you will never ever wash my feet!"*

*Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me."*

*9 Simon Peter exclaimed, "Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!"*

*10 Jesus replied, "A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not all of you." 11 For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, "Not all of you are clean."*

*12 After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing? 13 You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that's what I am. 14 And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. 15 I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. 16 I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. 17 Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them."*

This is our final week of the Reflect Series. For the last four weeks we've been dwelling on and thinking deeply about who we are as a church and as people, and at the same time we've been learning what it means to accurately represent the God who made us and loves us- we're learning to reflect His heart in our lives. Around here we often describe this as Living Fully, Loving Deeply & Giving Freely. A person who embodies these characteristics- someone who is growing in these three areas- is a person who reflects the character and the heart of God.

This is why our vision is to Help People Find Their Way Back to God- because He's the God who seeks us out, and we find rest and restoration in Him. This is why we can Live Fully, because Jesus offers us life and life to the full. This is why we Love Deeply, because we've seen Christ's sacrificial love for us, and now it has taken root in us.

Which brings us to today's challenge- It's not enough for us to simply experience life to the full in Christ. It's not enough for us to know and share His love. When we choose to follow Jesus, He calls us to Give Freely of ourselves in service to each other. We must learn how to reflect the generosity of God by being people who Give Freely as He does.

And because God knows us well- including our tendency to want to do the bare minimum- Jesus shows us the kind of service He wants from us by taking up a basin and towel and washing His disciples' feet.

What a curious thing to do for another person- washing their feet? What does this mean? It seems like such an odd form of service, but today I think there are some specific ways Jesus would have us learn from His humble act toward His disciples.

Let me begin by talking about foot washing, because this sounds completely strange to us, but it was not an uncommon practice back at that time. Proper etiquette in the East during the time of Christ was to welcome a guest into one's home by washing their feet. Roads were not paved, people walked everywhere, and sandals allowed dust and dirt to collect on a person's feet, so the common courtesy of the day was to wash all of that off. Clearly this was not an enjoyable task for obvious reasons. Dirty feet stink. The lowest servant in the house was responsible for carrying out this job. When the Jewish people were conquered by the Romans, this job- washing feet- was on a list of works that they would not agree to perform.

No one wants to wash dirty feet, including the disciples. They've gathered together with Jesus for the Passover meal and now they're seated at the table with Him, but clearly none of them have taken it upon themselves to carry out this task. And why would they? One doesn't wash the feet of one's peers. That's a job for the servants. In fact, we know from the other Gospel accounts that the disciples were arguing at the table about various roles and positions that they would have when Jesus' overthrew the Romans. They've just witnessed the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Crowds of people lined the streets with shouts of Hosanna! They waved palm branches. In the minds of the disciples a new kingdom was imminent and they were vying for the most prestigious roles in the cabinet.

And while they are arguing, Jesus, their Lord and Teacher, removes his robe; fills a basin with water, wraps a towel around His waist and begins to wash the grime from the feet of His followers. He was their leader! He was the last person in the room who would be responsible for washing feet. And yet Jesus takes on the lowliest job- the job of the lowliest servant in the house- and serves his disciples.

Jesus gave freely by serving even when the task was "beneath him," because Jesus did not consider any task to be beneath Him.

Can you picture the disciples' faces when they realized what Jesus was doing? Can you imagine how quickly their chatter about who would be greatest in the Kingdom turned to stunned silence? Mouths gaping. And we think to ourselves, "those disciples were such idiots!" "How could they be so ignorant?" But if we're honest with ourselves, had we been in the room, we would have been just as clueless.

The problem with you and me is that we look down on the disciples' foolishness, imagining ourselves to be much more clever and capable than they were, and when we do we might as well find ourselves seated at the table with them arguing about pointless things. We, who are equally capable of allowing pride to cloud our thinking, should be cautious about comparing and contrasting ourselves with others.

Jesus didn't bother with such things. He simply began washing feet. If we want to be like Him, we'll avoid posturing ourselves, and positioning ourselves and instead we'll begin serving.

When Peter realized what was happening, he wanted to put a stop to it. (8 "No," Peter protested, "you will never ever wash my feet!") Jesus overcomes Peter's resistance by assuring him that unless he allows himself to be washed by Jesus he won't belong to Him. Peter replies, "Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!" It's a very important exchange. What does it all mean?

With the hindsight of the cross we can begin to understand. As Jesus washed the disciples' feet He was foreshadowing the cleansing work of Calvary. His humbling moment of service for them around that table, points directly toward Jesus' ultimate act of humility, when He will willingly lay down His life for them. 1 John 4:10 tells us, "This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

Take note of the fact that Judas is a part of the meal at this point, which means Jesus has washed his feet too. This is a caution for all of us here. Not all who claim to follow Jesus are truly "His own." Even some who receive the outward washing of Jesus are still unwashed in heart. You might be asking, "What does he mean?" Let me explain.

Baptism and Communion are powerful displays of the grace of Jesus, but they aren't what saves us. Jesus saves us. Our safety is found when we keep close to Him- He is the hope of our salvation.

Jesus Gave Freely by serving even when others discouraged Him. And because Jesus gave freely, we receive life and forgiveness, hope and healing- He's the essential component- not something we do. As the great old hymn says:

*My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus Christ, my righteousness  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame  
But wholly lean on Jesus' name  
On Christ the solid rock I stand  
All other ground is sinking sand- All other ground is sinking sand*

Peter tried to discourage Jesus from giving, but He would not be dissuaded, and Jesus kept on giving as was led up a hillside to be crucified, and He continues to give even today if we're willing to receive what He offers. The question is not whether Jesus gives, it's will we? Will we resemble Him in our generosity? Will we reflect His heart in the way that we serve? Or will we let voices of discouragement prevent us from doing so?

There's one final way for us to learn from Jesus' act of washing His disciples feet. Jesus gave freely by serving even when the timing was inconvenient.

Consider that Jesus was just hours from being arrested when He serves the disciples in this way- and He knows it. What would you choose to do with your final hours? Would you spend them willingly wiping up the muck from your friend's feet? Not if you could help it, I'm guessing.

In Jesus' final moments with his followers He chooses to model servant heartedness. There's a lesson in there for us if we're willing to pay attention. Serving is rarely convenient. It almost never fits nicely into a schedule. In fact, if your only acts of service are ones in which you are inconvenienced very little, you have to ask yourself if what you're performing is really service.

Serving costs us-- sometimes a little, sometimes a lot. This makes giving of ourselves the least attractive element of Live, Love, Give. But if you cannot bring yourself to serve, you cannot claim to follow Christ because He served and He asks us to do the same.

*15 I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. 16 I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. 17 Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.*

The question is not whether or not we should serve, but where & how? What does it look like- for you and for me- to take up the basin and the towel? How do we go about reflecting Jesus' heart for serving today?

I'm not going to prescribe a formula for you to follow on this one. There are so many ways to serve others and we are each wired so differently with skills and experiences that it would be presumptuous for me to dictate how you should give. All I can do is ask, the rest is up to you. Will you serve? Will you give? Will you allow the work of God's Holy Spirit in your heart to well up and overflow in acts of generosity?