

Humble Awareness
A Sermon for Maundy Thursday, April 13, 2017
John 13:1-17, 31b-35
Lansdowne UMC

Visual: <https://goo.gl/images/C8vaJ0>

Think about your tongue, and it feels all puffed up in your mouth. It's pretty odd. But do you know what the Christian version of being aware of your tongue is? Being aware of your own humility. If you become aware that you're humble, then you immediately start being proud of yourself for how humble you are. You start feeling puffed up. So then you realize that and you put that feeling of pride down, and then you're proud of yourself for how you overcame the temptation to be prideful at your humility... and the cycle continues.

So how do you become humble if the second you try to become humble, you end up simply realizing how puffed up you are? I think it's the same way that you overcome an awareness of your tongue! You have to think of something else. It'll be by keeping your attention on Jesus rather than on yourself. We just keep looking at Jesus-- who he is, what he does, what he teaches, and we use all of the grace God gives us to become like him. And when we're not even paying attention, our ego recedes into the background. We decrease, and Jesus increases.

In this story from the Gospel of John, Jesus and his disciples just sat down to have supper. We know that we're nearly at passover. And we're told that the devil had already put it in Judas's heart to betray Jesus.

We're also let in on some things that Jesus knew (In verse 3 of John chapter 13)

- Jesus knew the Father had given everything into his hands
- Jesus knew that he had come from God
- Jesus knew he was returning to God

It's like the Gospel writer is saying, "before I tell you what Jesus did next, I just want to make sure you remember who this is that we're talking about. Let's look at the big picture here. Remember I told you that the Word of God who was with God in the beginning became flesh and lived among us? This is that same one. This is the one that God the Father had given everything to. He came from God. He was going to go be with God again. This isn't just a teacher we're talking about. This is the Son of God.

And so Jesus, the Son of God, pushes the pause button on dinner. He gets up from the table. He takes the servant's position, and he washes the disciples feet.

Now, it wouldn't have been that uncommon for a host of a dinner to wash the feet of his guests if he were poor or didn't have a servant to do it. Washing feet is an act of hospitality. It's the thing you do when your guests arrive at your home after walking on dusty or muddy roads. But perhaps to emphasize how urgent this message is, Jesus doesn't wash his disciples feet when they arrive, but he interrupts the regularly scheduled dinner.

Jesus doesn't just teach humble service-- he is the humble servant. Paul says in Philippians chapter 2 "Although he was in the form of God

[which could also be translated ‘*because* he was in the form of God,’] he didn’t consider his being equal to God as something to be exploited [to be used for his own self interest] but he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant...”

We know the story. The extent to which Jesus is going to love and serve his disciples is truly incredible. He’s going to lay his life down for his friends. Wow. The only begotten Son of God is going to lay his life down for me and for you. Wow. Thank you Jesus. Thank you for being willing to love me and serve me so much.

That’s usually the part where we stop, isn’t it? But Jesus doesn’t. He says, “If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you too must wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example: Just as I have done, you also must do. I assure you, servants aren’t greater than their master, nor are those who are sent greater than the one who sent them”

Did you catch that? If Jesus, with all of the authority and power that has been given to him by God the Father is willing to lovingly set aside all of the rights and the privileges that come with his position, who am I to think that I am better than him. Certainly I should be the least servant. That’s where humility begins.

But I don’t think that humility is point. The point is not that we literally wash one another’s feet-- although presumably that would be a powerful and very challenging was to get the point across. No, I think humility is a means to an end-- and that end is love.

First humility is a means to a deeper relationship with God. We humans, we tend to think we're pretty great. We're the dominant species on the planet earth, right? Then there's things like cockroaches. We instinctively know how much greater we are than they are. ... And yet humility teaches us to recognize that there is an infinitely greater distance between me and God than there is between me and a cockroach. That's how great God is. God is so far above all of creation that the full greatness of God cannot even be thought. And yet that immeasurably great God sees fit to come in the person of Jesus and take the form of a servant. Church might be boring, but the Christian story is anything but boring! And understanding our position before God is the first step recognizing our need for God.

So first humility can lead to a deeper relationship with God. But secondly, humility opens the door to love for other people. Think about it. I'm sure we've all met people who just *knew* that they were better than us. They just *knew* that they were smarter, more athletic, more successful, wealthy-- whatever the case may be. This is someone who when you tell them about something you care about in life, they just turn their nose up at you and move on to talk to someone that has achieved more in life.

How could that person possibly love you? Their pride keeps them from seeing you as a person. Oh God forgive us when we've been that proud person, looking down on other people for some reason or another.

That's how the world works, but Jesus' disciples are supposed to be different. Jesus says "this is how everyone will know that you're my

disciples-- that you love each other.” What would it look like to obey Jesus?

It’s about serving one another-- washing one another’s nasty, icky feet, so to speak. But it’s about more than that. A Christ-like act of service isn’t just doing the required thing for someone. It’s valuing that person for who they are, in spite of their faults, to the point where loving service flows out of how much you value and care for that person. It’s about changing our emphasis from seeing what’s wrong with someone to seeing what’s *right* with someone.

It’s keeping our eyes off of ourselves and fixing them on Christ, and on Christ in our Christian brothers and sisters.

There is this gift of a prayer from that Catholic Church called the [Litany of Humility](#):

From the desire of being esteemed,

Deliver me, Jesus.

From the desire of being loved...

From the desire of being extolled ...

From the desire of being honored ...

...

That others may be loved more than I,

Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.

That others may be esteemed more than I ...

That, in the opinion of the world,

others may increase and I may decrease ...

That others may become holier than I, provided that I may become as holy as I should...