

On Your Knees **John 13:1-17, 34-35**

Introduction

Robert Greenleaf was born in Terre Haute IN in 1904. After graduating from college, he went to work as a manager for the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, now known as AT&T.

- After a few years he became very disillusioned with the power-centered and authoritarian leadership style that was so prominent in his and other U.S. institutions at the time.
- To him it was clear that this approach was not working.
- There had to be a better way, so he set out to find out what that new and better way might be.

In his search, he was inspired by an essay written by a German philosopher titled “Journey to the East” in which a band of men set out on a mythical journey.

- The glue that held them together was a man named Leo. He accompanied the party as their servant, doing menial chores but also sustaining them with his spirit and his song. He is a person of extraordinary presence.
- Everything went well with this journey until Leo suddenly disappeared. When that happened, the group fell into disarray and the journey was abandoned.
- They simply could not make it without the servant Leo.

Now, as it so happened, Greenleaf was a member of the Society of Friends (better known as the Quakers), so he quickly realized the parallel between Leo's story and the story of Jesus. The more he thought about it, the more he came to understand the lifestyle of Jesus was the antidote to the leadership model he was experiencing at AT&T.

He resigned his position and founded a new company: The Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership. Though he did not use Christian terminology, he did begin to teach leaders how to act like Jesus did. That is ...

Focus on being a servant, not on being the boss.

That is same message the Apostle Paul tried to communicate in Philippians 2:

... have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8)

As we look this Lenten season at this line in the Lord's Prayer:

THY KINGDOM COME

We see in today's Gospel lesson that:

The kingdom does not come in power but with the mindset of a servant.

In other words, Jesus did not come as a powerful king, or a mighty military hero. Jesus was a foot washer.

- If He wanted to be a king, He had the perfect opportunity to pull that off on Palm Sunday. But power is not the Kingdom Way.

You saw that when two of His disciples tried to negotiate for the power seats in Christ's Kingdom: "Let us sit on your right and left hands!"

- Jesus taught them and us that power and authority are meaningless in Kingdom work.

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:25-28)

That's why Pastor Ray Pritchard of Keep Believing Ministries says:

Our world does not have a leadership crisis. What we have is a servanthood crisis. We have too many people who want to be first, who want to lead the parade, who want to be on top of the heap, who want the big office, the title, the power, the perks and the prestige. We don't have enough people who are willing to work behind the scenes. We don't have enough people who really want to wash dirty feet. (Ray Pritchard)

So what lessons can we learn when our "Thy Kingdom Come" prayer comes face to face with calls for power? Three lessons:

LESSON #1: A SERVANT UNDERSTANDS HE IS ULTIMATELY SERVING GOD

Look at verses 13:3-4

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. (John 13:3-4)

Ultimately it is God we are serving. Not ourselves. Not even the people whose feet we wash.

- Put more specifically to this story, Jesus was not serving the disciples when He washed their feet. He was serving the Father.
- The people in the room thought Jesus was serving them. But they were wrong!

Servants always think about how to please the one they are serving. And Jesus was thinking about the Father.

A generation ago, Elmer Towns was on staff with Jerry Falwell at the Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, VA. Towns told a story about a big, burly biker dude who came to faith in Jesus in a pretty dramatic fashion.

- This guy totally looked the part of “biker dude.” Not only was he big and burly, he had long black hair that he kept under a red bandana. He had a full thick beard and tattoos all over his body. He wore a black leather jacket and jeans with chains. To the average person at Thomas Road Baptist, he looked scary.
- But after his conversion, this biker dude knew he was supposed to go to church. That's all he knew, so he walked into Thomas Road Baptist Church one Sunday morning and went down to the second row and took a seat. Everyone in that huge auditorium saw him, and thought “who is that?”
- During the announcements that morning, Dr. Falwell made an appeal for nursery workers. He said they had a number of people call off that morning, and they needed more help. No one responded.
- So Dr. Falwell made the appeal a second time. He said, “Friends, we really do need someone to work in the nursery today.”
- After the second appeal this biker dude prayed a quick silent prayer. “Lord, I don't what I am supposed to do now that I am a Christian besides come to church. But if you want me to help out in the nursery, I am willing. So if the pastor asks a third time, I'm in.”
- Dr. Falwell finished the announcements, and just before he moved on he said “Friends, I don't know what to do. No one has volunteered, and we desperately need someone to work in the nursery this morning.”
- Immediately that big, burly biker dude jumped up and shouted “I'll do it” and started out the back of the auditorium. As he did, 50 other people jumped up and offered to go instead.

In the Gospel story, there was a job that needed to be done. **SOMEBODY** needed to wash the feet of those in attendance. It was a standard hygiene need.

- Those disciples, like many of us, had all kinds of reasons why it ought to be **SOMEBODY ELSE** who volunteered.
- We forget that we are serving God ... not the kids in the nursery, not the hungry at the food pantry, not even the people who need to have their feet washed.

The last person in that Upper Room that night who should have been washing dirty feet was Jesus. Anyone but Jesus!

- Peter said as much:

“No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.” (John 13:8)

- But Peter did not volunteer to take over either.

Why? Because none of the disciples wanted to serve the rest of the disciples.

- Jesus had no such hesitation. Because when you know you are serving God, no job is beneath you. You see a need and you fill it.

LESSON #2: A SERVANT SERVES EVEN THOSE WHO DON'T DESERVE IT

Look at verses 10-11:

Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. (John 13:10-11)

Picture Jesus working His way around the room. He washes Peter's feet. Then Andrew's. Then John's. Then James'.

- And then He comes to Judas.

The text for today tells us:

The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. (John 13:2)

Judas is next in line.

- What do you do when you are face-to-face with the man who will betray you?
- Many of us would have passed Judas up.
 - They don't deserve any act of kindness I might show them!
 - Do you know what they did to me?

The truth of the matter is that no one in that room deserved what Jesus was doing.

- You don't deserve it either. No matter how wonderful you think you are, Jesus came to earth to die because you don't measure up.

This is the hardest truth in all of Christianity for me to apply to myself. I am an expert in grudge-holding. I come from a long family line of grudge holders. I can guarantee that my ancestors can out-grudge any of your ancestors. I have been trained well.

- You don't know how many times I have prayed "Don't make me serve them, Lord! You know what they did!"
- I will confess I still have a long way to grow in this area of my Christian life.

Jesus knew that would be an issue for those disciples, and for us, so when He is done washing those feet – including the feet of Judas – He told those disciples:

Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. (John 13:14-15)

Whether they deserve it or not.

LESSON #3: A SERVANT FINDS A BLESSING IN SERVING

Look at verses 16-17:

Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. (John 13:16-17)

Notice this: The blessing is NOT in knowing what to do. The blessing is in actually DOING it. You know it, but you are blessed if you do it.

Blessing is the by-product of a life that is lived in the will of God. When we humbly serve others, walk in God's paths of holiness, and do what He tells us, then we will enjoy happiness. That is the Kingdom Way.

- The world rejoices when in BEING SERVED.
- The Kingdom of God know that real joy comes when we serve others in the name of Christ.

Serving doesn't come naturally. And it doesn't come automatically when we come to faith in Christ. We have to grow into it. One commentator calls it "an acquired taste like learning to like coffee."

But serving is the Kingdom way. And servanthood is what we seek when we pray "Thy Kingdom Come."

APPLICATION

Our memory verse for this Lenten season:

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:13-14)

Amen.