

1It 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 who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. 2The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. 3Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. 6He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." 9"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" 10Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." 11For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. 12When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. 13"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

## GUTTER HANDS

Did you ever find yourself in a position where you had to get your hands greasy -- where you had to humble yourself and deal with garbage, indignity, filth, or stench? In one of my brief job stints, I worked in a restaurant as a dishwasher. Every day, for eight hours, I was wiping off the excess from plates, dumping grease, and running my hands through people's fat and gristle. When I would be finished, my glasses had a layer of goop on them, my hands were like filthy prunes and my whole body smelled disgusting. I remember one day when I was hauling an oversize garbage bag with a load of food morsels, the whole thing opened up and dumped itself all over my pants and shoes. It was enough to make an ordinary kid give up his lunch. I couldn't wait to be done with that job. It paid well, but I didn't like what I had to deal with.

Whenever I go to the hospital, I can't help but notice how nurses and nursing assistants are always having to lower themselves so that their patients are cared for. They must draw blood, empty bottles, wipe and wash in places where people ordinarily care for themselves. They regularly work with people who haven't showered, who, in their weakness, are grumpy and grouchy, or who have lost control.

Most of us prefer careers of a different nature -- where we don't have to lower ourselves, embarrass ourselves, or get ourselves dirty. In fact, the modern citizen is regularly thinking about germs and disease everywhere and doing all in their power to keep themselves from being infected. Hand-shaking is decreasing, rubber gloves and face masks are on the rise, and sanitizing lotion, once unknown, is now a regular staple of purses and hallways.

Dirt. We don't like it. And we also don't like lowering ourselves beneath other people to the point of vulnerability. We'd rather be getting the upper hand, find ourselves on top of our game, and rise up through the ranks of corporate America.

Dirt. As Jesus kneels before his disciples and asks them, one by one, to offer him their un-pedicured, dusty, dirty, stinky feet, where he will take them in his hands and run his fingers through them with water from a basin to make them clean, His disciples are taken aback. They are shocked, likely horrified that He, their rabbi and teacher -- perhaps even the Promised One of God, would let himself be demoralized this way. Such a job was done by a servant or a slave, not by a man of honor. It was certainly not the medium for a king -- a noble -- a Messiah.

Peter speaks for them all when He declares, “Lord – YOU? Wash my feet? May it never be! I could never accept such a thing from you.”

But Jesus is using this act to show them why He came. And, in truth, it will get a lot worse for Him. Because in a few hours He will not only be dealing with dirty hands. No. Instead, He will find Himself exposed before the masses, reviled and scorned by men and women of far lesser character, and carrying the guilt and shame that comes from every manner of sin known to mankind. His hands will become the hands of murderers, of prostitutes, of pedophiles, of thieves. His innocent body will bear the marks of selfishness, greed, pride and anger. Talk about indignity – this is an indignity that not even the worst of sinners has known. For He will be held responsible for it all.

But that’s why He came. He didn’t come to have the disciples pamper Him – to have servants and slaves who attended to His every need. He didn’t come to have a limo and bodyguards – manicures and pedicures, massages and bubble baths, and robes and riches. He came to get down and dirty with us.

And so Jesus rebukes Peter’s “NEVER ME, LORD” and says, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." In other words, “Peter, there is NO WAY you can be clean before God without Me getting dirty for you, without me being shamed for you, without my being humbled to the point of death on a cross.”

Have you ever taken the time to think about Jesus in this way? Shamed. Scorned. Abused. Reviled. BECAUSE He became, for you and me, the sin that most embarrasses us – the act that is most disgusting, the evil that we want to sweep under the carpet. He took it.

And, in our place He suffered its consequence: the just sentence of separation from God. The wrath of the Law’s hammer that strikes the judges desk and says, “GUILTY, GUILTY, GUILTY!!”

This is who Jesus is. Not just a good teacher who has wise sayings. Not just a good example of kindness and generosity. Not just a compassionate one, a wise one, an inspiring one. No. He is the servant who willingly lays down His claim on honor and subjects Himself to the worst the world has to offer. Indignity. Shame. Disgrace. Jesus took all that so that we might be free, so that we might be clean, so that we might have hope and a future. And He offers to

those very ones who would betray Him, shame Him, run from His side when He needed them the most, “This is My Body, given for you. This is my blood shed for you. For the forgiveness of all your sins.”

Is there any greater service than to offer the very lifeblood that flows through your veins to the thankless and the failure and the guilty and the broken? But that’s who Jesus is on this night. The perfect Servant.

And Jesus says to Peter, "Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 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. I tell you the truth, 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.”

“Whoa!!! Wait a minute Jesus!! What do you mean here? I can’t be YOU!”

And He says, “I’m not asking you to save the world from sin or to give your life on a cross carrying the guilt of all mankind. I’m only asking you to be a servant, to humble yourselves, get down on your knees, and don’t worry about the dirt, the indignity, the grunt work.”

“Whoa! Lord -- I don’t want to be you! I’d rather keep my hands clean and my body spotless. I’d rather not be found on my hands and knees scrubbing and washing.”

But the Jesus who saved us by climbing into our indignity, calls us to a higher standard – a greater journey. He calls us to represent Him to the world for who He is.

And that means you and I have been sent by Him to get down and dirty. That is, to serve a fallen humanity by being willing to travel the road He did for us. And that might mean swallowing our pride and forgiving someone who has wronged us. And that might mean putting our hand to the plow not for our own house and property, but to help someone else maintain or repair theirs. And that might mean taking the dirty hand of a poor man to bring him bread. And that might mean offering ourselves to volunteer our time, our treasure, our talent so that others’ needs are met.

Are you willing to take your time to pray for a scoundrel? Are you willing to take your money and pay the freight for a villain? Are you ready to give everything, when the payback might be nothing – to sacrifice it all, even when no one may notice?

I don't know about you, but I want my good deeds to be noticed and I want them to be for people that deserve it. I want the world to have a better opinion of me because of how I live. And, if I'm going to serve, I want the people I serve to recognize what I have done. But I also am not so prone to lowering myself, humbling myself, going beyond the call of duty without appreciation. I'm prone to living for myself and doing what I want. I have a hard enough times serving my family, let alone the people out there.

And that's where the supernatural comes in. Because, by nature, we won't. We will always be about glory and honor and praise and appreciation. Our egos will despise the basin. Our self-centeredness will loathe the towel. We'll want to sit back and watch TV, go out to dinner, and take a vacation.

But He who offered His very lifeblood to the sinners who forsook Him, also pours Himself into us. And, by the power of His Spirit, maybe we find ourselves opening our hands just a little wider, giving of ourselves more and more – even when no one notices. Because that's who He is.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.