

# Servants

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**Bible Text:** John 13:1-17

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## Reformation Church (OPC)

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Brothers and sisters, I want to remind you this morning we come together to worship God. We have not come to see the crowd, although a crowd attracts a crowd. We are not here to hear some superstar. R.C. is a superstar, but we are not here for the preacher. We are not here for each other. Primarily we are here for God. We are God centric people and we are here to reclaim his glory, to insist upon it and to pattern it by our worship here this morning. So every single one of you, I encourage you. I exhort you to gain a glimpse, an understanding of the God that we worship and bring him the glory that is due his name. God deserves the glory. God requires the glory. God demands the glory. God by definition is the glory. And let's just mirror that back to him as the one who is deserving of these things.

Psalm 24 I read at the beginning. I want to carry on with the last few verses now, the exhortation. Psalm 24 verse seven.

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory.<sup>1</sup>

Now it is difficult for us to relate to what is being said. This is a call to worship. And this is the environment, this is the situation in which worship occurs. We come into the presence of the King who is deserving of our glory and the King is defined here as the Lord of hosts, God himself.

Now we haven't experienced this kind of a scene very much and so it is very hard for us to relate to his where George W. Bush is coming to town. Barack Obama, the great President of the United States is coming to town. Get all the children dressed up, honey. We plan on this for two weeks ahead. Momma buys a new dress and we are going to

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 24:7-10.

prepare ourselves. We make sure we are down there, the streets of Denver on time because Barack Obama is coming to town.

Most of us we hear that Barack Obama is coming. We just stay at home. Not much to see. George W. Bush, probably the same thing. The greatest political leaders are sometimes actually most often military leaders. Why is that?

George Washington, a great leader in this country and a great leader because he won our battle for us against the greatest empire of that time, the English Empire, an amazing war took place and our great leader... And if you read the stories you know that amidst great opposition, against tremendous odds this great president, this great general at that time took on these enemies and did it with tremendous courage and, I believe, faith in God as well. And he became President of the United States. And they would have kept him as President of the United States for the rest of his life, for 40 years. They would have brought his son in. I suppose if John Adams had had his wish, maybe, but they appreciated him.

Why did they appreciate him? He won their battles for us.

Now it is hard for us to imagine a leader who doesn't tyrannize and oppress and tax the people. But they have existed before. There have been great men before who have done great things in battle for the people and the people have turned out en masse to welcome the great man as he returned from the battle.

This is what we get here. The Lord of hosts, the God of all battle, a God who goes out there and leads the troops into battle. He has returned from the heart of [?], 500,000 dead [?] in his way. He has entered the incredibly formidable, wicked, terrifying dark land of [?] and he has waged terrible war and his sores are bloody and they decorate his garments and much of that blood is his own and he rides into town and nobody is going to stay home now. They are going to be here to welcome their general, the great captain of all hosts. And somebody cries out, "Open the gates." And he enters the city and we all strain to see him. The children on their dads' soldiers.

Wait. He stops. Wait. He speaks. People lean forward. There is no microphone. There is no speaker system. I have got to hear what he is saying. My captain is speaking. I am listening.

And then we start singing a sentimental ditty and fall asleep in the boring worship that follows.

No. No, 100 nos. We come into the worship of our king. We [?]. Amen? What do the people do? They listen. They shout. They exalt. They glorify their captain because of his military conquest. And every Sunday our captain returns and his sword is bloody and as he continues to tread out the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of almighty God, he comes in with his sword bloody again and God's people, after the fall of Rome in AD 475 and they saw what he did, the judgment of God upon that wicked people that had

persecuted God's people for hundreds of years prior, Rome was dead. Rome was gone. His sword was bloody. God's people worshipped him.

Rome is gone. Forced immunization is gone. Eugenics, more or less gone. George Tiller the killer, the greatest abortionist in the history of this country gone, dead. The sword of Christ is bloody.

But wait a minute. You recognize something. What is that on his sword? Why that is your stinking flesh. It is your stinking flesh. He has you on his sword. He has killed you, too. And you were crucified with him so that you could be freed from the bondage of your sins.

Amen, hallelujah. The blessed freedom that we enjoy. Isn't that what we have been talking about this last weekend? The freedom we enjoy is the freedom from sin won by the sword of Jesus Christ that pierced you to the heart and carved the flesh of your stinking body away from you. And I know the process continues, but Jesus has delivered you from the bondage of your sins. It is a bloody, violent salvation, my friends, but Jesus is victorious at the cross. He is victorious in history and he has conquered our hearts.

And here is the implication. Here is the application. The application is nobody here. Nobody, I tell you, nobody. Nobody gets the right to sit there and say, "I can't overcome this fleshly urge to alcoholism. I can't overcome this fleshly urge to lie. Porn addiction. I can't overcome this tendency to mine to get angry all the time or slothfulness or gossip or I can't forgive this brother." Not when our captain comes to town. Amen?

*Heavenly Father, we confess to you that we have not always embraced your freedom. Freedom for us might have been freedom to sin. We have shirked the idea that you were the one who took the chains of our flesh off of us. You were the one that raised us from the dead, from the captivity, the Egypt of our sins. We forget this, God. We don't see that debts and tyrannies and sin in our evil and our lives and we don't cry out for deliverance from these things as we ought to because we don't appreciate the captain of our salvation and what he did on the cross. So we come to the cross this morning and confess all of this. We are unworthy sinners. Oh, we have been bound by our own bondage, captive by our own blindness. But, oh God, at the cross, we confess that we are sinners. And Jesus makes us free.*

And now we take a moment to confess our sins before the Lord.

*In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

Change of Voice:

Our text this morning is found in the gospel of John chapter 13. I will be reading verse one through 17. Please stand for the reading of God's Word.

Now hear the Word of God.

Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.<sup>2</sup>

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God endures forever.

Let us pray.

*Good and gracious Father, we ask this morning that you would be pleased to send your Spirit among us, that by the foolishness of preaching we might be changed, that we, indeed, would have our flesh cut from us, that all that is displeasing to you would be cut away and that you would remake us into the image of our husband, the expressed image of your glory, even Jesus our Lord. And we ask this in his precious name. Amen.*

Please be seated.

We are, I suspect all of us all too familiar with the danger of all too familiar texts. We read through our Bibles and there are things in there that we are less clear on, that we have less familiarity with and then there are those places where we are more clear. This is a problem for all of us, particularly for those of us who preach.

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<sup>2</sup> John 13:1-17.

At Saint Peter Church where I have spent the last 13 years ministering it is our habit and has been from the start that we would preach exegetically, which means, in part, that we would preach through particular books of the Bible. And one of the blessings, one of the ideas underneath that idea is that this will keep us from preaching our own hobby horses, that you don't just get to pick and choose.

Now there are exegetical churches and then there are exegetical churches. I venture to guess that if you were to do survey this morning of reformed churches, you would find that the vast majority of them also believing in preaching book by book from a list. The majority of those, I venture to guess, will be somewhere in one of Paul's epistles. That is what we do. But when you try to open up the whole of the body and preach the whole of the body then you face some peculiar challenges. You go into your study. It is time for you to prepare to preach and you come to the next text and you turn the page in the Bible. God's holy Word says, "And Nadab begat [?] and [?] begat [?]." And you think, how am I going to preach this?

And in those moments, that is when you long for those exciting moments in the text, the great moments where the flood begins to pour out on Noah and his family, when Abraham takes Isaac up to Mount Moriah, where Jesus walks out of the tomb alive where you go into your study to prepare for those. You have this other problem. Everybody knows about this place. Everybody has heard dozens of sermons on this.

And, friend, even though we are pastors, we are such sinners we show up here feeling a compulsion, as wicked as it may be, to bring you something new.

It is not just pastors that have this problem, I suspect. I suspect that many of you have this problem and it has exhibited itself in this way. Perhaps you have a reading through the Bible plan. Perhaps you take a quiet time every day and you read through your Scriptures and perhaps sometimes you begin to read a particular text, you start into John 13 and the text says, "And Jesus took off his robe and he put on the towel," and your mind says, "Oh, yes. Jesus washes the disciples feet." And your eyes race down to the end of that story to start the next one.

Either way we have a problem. We have familiar texts. We have less familiar texts. But one of the hardest things about these familiar texts, particularly this one, is that because we are familiar with it we have lost out our ability to be shocked by what is truly shocking, because we have read it before. And when we lose that ability we lose the ability to truly learn from the text thinking we know it already.

We have an astonishing event here before us. And what we have from John who records this for us is a shift in perspective as we come to this place. Throughout John's gospel up until this point, pretty much the story has been given to us in one of two formats. Up until this point either Jesus is answering the Pharisees. You know all those stories in the gospel of John where Jesus is out ministering to folks and the Pharisee comes up and says, "Well, Jesus, what about this?" And Jesus does a little verbal [?] on the Pharisee and he is lying on the ground and Jesus walks away. It happens all the time. Or Jesus is giving

some larger presentation to a larger crowd. He is giving a great sermon. We are given in all of these contexts a more broad view.

But here in John 13 the focus narrows down to just Jesus and his disciples. We get a small, intimate portrait of what is going on in the upper room. We zero in. Jesus is dealing with the crowd. Jesus is answering his critics. But now the text tells us:

“Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own...”<sup>3</sup>

We zero in and John says, “Jesus loved his own.”

But I want you to notice the grammar here. It is a little bit unusual, at least to our English familiar ears. It says that Jesus , comma... well, Jesus... and then he is going to go to the Father, comma...

“...having loved His own who were in the world...”<sup>4</sup>

Comma...

Don't you expect next a contrast? Well, he loved them, but... but that is not at all what happens.

The text says he loved his own and he loved them to the end. Jesus loved them and he loved them. Twice we are told here in the first verse that Jesus loves his own. But that is not all we are given in that first verse. What is the context in which we are told about Jesus' love? Jesus knows that his hour is come.

I don't know if you have this problem. I have this problem. When I have problems I look at me. I look at my problems as an invitation, as a ticket to be self absorbed, to be self interested.

You know, I am going through a lot right now. I don't have energy and time to give to you because I am going through a lot. You see, my life is difficult and so you are just going to have to adjust for me, because, as you can see, I am going through a hard time.

But John not only tells us that Jesus is left with the disciples, he tells us in this context he knew that his hour had come. What hour is that?

Is Jesus saying, “Here my ascension is coming up pretty soon. I am really excited about that and that is what... you know, you guys are great. It is great having you guys with me and because pretty soon I am going to be going up to my Father. I am going to sit at the right hand of power. Boy, it will be great. I am so glad to have you guys celebrating with me today.”

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<sup>3</sup> John 13:1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

That is not it. The hour that is coming is that hour that makes every ounce of hardship and struggle I have ever had appear rightly miniscule, microscopic. The hour that is coming upon Jesus is that hour at which time his Father in heaven will pour out the whole wrath of hell upon him. And the text tells us twice he loved his own.

Just so we are not insufficiently wowed by this love in this context, we get another contrast. Verse two.

“And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him...”<sup>5</sup>

Jesus is about to experience the wrath of the Father at Calvary. He loves them. He loves them and there is Judas who is really bad. We are getting the love of Christ in bold relief, in preparation for this story. And we are given a shocking event.

John directs our gaze to this astonishing event for which we should always ask, no matter how many sermons we have heard, no matter how many times you read this text. How is this possible? How is it possible that the Lord of glory could perform such a humbling act? How could he stoop so low?

Now, friends, if you have ever heard a sermon on this text and you have heard what I am about to tell you, but if I don’t tell it to you I will lose my union card. So I have got to tell you the story to give you an idea about what is going on here. You may not... you know this. You have heard this, that in this time frame and in this culture in first century Palestine if you were a prosperous family that meant you had servants, servants who worked in your home. But it wasn’t an egalitarian servant hood. That is, it wasn’t like there were bosses and then there was this single layer of servants where you had generals and everybody else was a private. But you had in your home, as you did in other contexts and other cultures, you had layers of authority among those who were servants.

Think about it in the life of Joseph was given charge over all of Potiphar’s wealth, later on given charge over all of Egypt. This is not the typical job for a sermon in someone’s house.

Well, in fact, if you lived in first century Palestine and you weren’t part of a prosperous family and you rolled into Jerusalem and you were looking for a job and your résumé was a little thin, you didn’t knock on the door of the prosperous family and they said, “Well, come on in. We would like you to be in charge of the wine cellar. You could be the head chef. Here is what we would like you to do. We would like you to travel ahead of the master, stay in all the nicest hotels and eat in all the best restaurants so you can tell him what he should do. That is your starting job.”

I like that.

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<sup>5</sup> John 13:2.

No, no. You start at the bottom and what is the bottom? The most inexperienced, lowest part of the chain of the ladder of the slave hierarchy was a foot washer. That is your first job. Today you don't clean latrines. That is when you graduate. Today you start washing feet. This is the lowest job and here we have the Lord of glory. We are supposed to ask: How could he do that?

Now, friends, throughout the Scriptures and, in fact, throughout Jesus' answering of the Pharisees, what we see time again is Jesus presenting the right side up economy of his world that we don't understand. Jesus tells us, "You want to be first, you have got to be last. You want to live, you have got to die."

All of the stuff that we don't expect and we learn from this a true and valuable important lesson, that if you want to be exalted, you need to start with humility. Absolutely true.

How do you do that? Here is the strange thing about our picture. It takes us a step before that. How do you get to humble? You get to exaltation through humility. How do you get to humility? The text tells us.

"Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God..."<sup>6</sup>

The text does not say, "Jesus, looking forward to his exaltation, Jesus, hoping that the Father would lift him up, Jesus, knowing that humility is the right thing, Jesus, thinking poorly of himself, Jesus went and did these things."

Not at all, but the exact opposite. The humility comes from the glory. Jesus could do what he did because he knew who he was, the very Son of God.

The point in the text isn't to contrast the glory with the humility, but to show that the humility can only grow out of the glory. Well, yeah, but this is all symbolic, you know. This is a play that Jesus is putting on. This is a living parable, prophetic theater, which is absolutely true. You know what Jesus is doing here. Jesus is doing this pantomime, this play to demonstrate the significance and the reality of his entire earthly ministry. It is all symbolic.

And to help us understand that, I have to do just a little bit of theology. I hope you don't mind. I know we have a lot of visitors here. Let me introduce you to a little thing we call the Westminster Shorter Catechism, a wonderful tool. The Westminster Shorter Catechism says on question number four, "What is God?" And the answer is, "God is a Spirit: infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth."

Or if you are an eight year old, "in his being, wisdom, power holiness, justice, goodness and truth." You don't get the whole philosophical end.

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<sup>6</sup> John 13:3.



That is who God is. It also says, “There are three persons in the godhead, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.”

Now let me ask you a question. This is why I want you to get this. God the Son is equal and power and glory to God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, right? And God the Son, like God the Father and God the Holy Spirit is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable.

Stick with me here.

Which means this. Before the creation of the world how much glory did God the Son have? On a scale from one to infinity, how much glory did God the Son have? Infinity. Good.

Now when God made the whole world, how much glory did God the Son have then from a scale of one to infinity? Infinity.

Ok, now here is the hard one. When God the Son took on flesh and dwelt among us, was born of a virgin in a stable, how much glory did God the Son have on a scale from one to infinity? Infinity.

When God the Son in union with his humanity suffered on the cross, how much glory? Infinity.

At the resurrection? Infinity.

At the ascension? Infinity?

At the return? Infinity.

Forever and ever and ever? Infinity.

God the Son never lost any of his glory and he never will.

Instead, that immutable glory in the incarnation is there. When Jesus takes off the robe which is a symbol of his glory and takes on the form of the servant by tying the towel around his waist and girding up his... what he has on, he is taking on the form of a servant. He is still glory. But this is representing his carnation in coming to earth. And when he came to earth, what did he do? He washed us from our sin.

Now how do we know this? Well, one way we know this, again, I... this is a little, tiny book, isn't it? Now when God tells you something in here there is a reason. Don't you think that if Jesus washed the disciples' feet and then Jesus spoke about this and then Jesus gave them a new commandment and then they ate... Don't you think we would have pretty good idea that he wasn't still on his knees?

I was watching a television program the other day and I noticed something. People never say goodbye on the phone on television. Do you know that? Do you know why? They don't have time. We know they are going to say goodbye. Goodbye is boring. But they cut that out. But yet our text tells us, "Oh, by the way, he got back up and he put his robe back on."

Oh, thank goodness. He might have gotten cold.

This is a symbol of his ascension into heaven so that there is no longer a veiling of his glory to his returning to his position of glory and prominence. He sits again in authority once more robed with glory and honor. Jesus was showing that his life—and I think he did this because I am a Presbyterian for three reasons. The first reason Jesus did this, beloved, I think is this. He wanted us to learn at the beginning of our humility in facing the reality of our own dirty feet.

Now we reformed people, we have immunized ourselves against this reality, ironically, because we affirm the doctrine of total depravity. We think that believing in the doctrine of total depravity is the same thing as knowing how sinful we are. That is actually a hedge against it. We could think about people here. People are bad. People are really bad. They are totally bad. They are not only totally bad, they are totally depraved. People are like that. Very different from Lord be merciful to me a sinner.

We are like Peter. We love Jesus. We are on Jesus' side. We want to see the kingdom expand. We want to be his faithful soldiers. Isn't that true of us, especially us? Don't we tend to see ourselves as not only soldiers in God's army, but as the elite corps, Jesus' own republican guard? Don't we see our families as special ops, lots of children, home schooling?

You see, if we had been there, we wouldn't have made Peter's mistake. We would have made a much worse mistake. If we would have been there, Jesus is down there washing these feet, he is washing these feet and we would be like, yeah. We would get down and start washing feet.

And Jesus would stop, look at us. What are you doing? Have you seen your feet? Get back up there and wait for me to wash your feet.

Friends, we are not God's heroes. We are not the great soldiers in his army. We are dead. We are lying there in the battlefield killed, dead in our sins and as Jesus told Peter, the only way for us to live is if the Lord of glory should humble himself and wash our feet. The first lesson is we are people of dirty feet. We are dead. We are dirty. Our nasty awful feet reflect our nasty awful hearts. And we need Jesus, as great as he is, to clean us or we cannot be clean.

There is another lesson here and it might be a little smaller one, but it is an important one. Jesus washes Judas' feet. And our text goes to tell us two different times Jesus knows who he is. Jesus knows what he is up to. Not everybody getting their feet washed gets

clean feet. But Jesus does not on his own at this point unilaterally excommunicate Judas. He is patient and he waits. And in the meantime he ministers to Judas.

Now the third truth is not as simple as we might think. We are called to go and to do likewise. Now I know we all believe in serving each other. I suspect whether you are at Reformation or whether you attend some other church that you have this part way down. I know one way we have it at our church, one of those great moments of service, the church where I serve in Virginia, like here we have lots of large families. Our parking lot is filled with full size vans. People have lots of babies. When people have babies we serve each other, right? If someone has a baby and outside that house these full size vans begin to line up like airplanes waiting to land in Atlanta. Right? And each one of these vans has something very special inside, a casserole.

Now it is a good thing for us to bring food to these families when these moms have just given birth and these dads, they don't know what they are doing. Bring us food. It is a good thing. But let's not kid ourselves. This is not sacrificial giving and a demonstration of sacrificial love among the brethren. Do you know what that casserole really is? It is a ticket to go see the baby.

Now part of the message here is quite literally if we go to do this for one another we are supposed to do the unpleasant jobs for each other.

I have the same problem in my own house. We have eight children. There are times that that can get a little bit frazzling and difficult. It has been known to happen that I will come out of my office and there is my wife and she is at her wit's end and I say, "Dear, whatever is troubling you?" Because I am like that and she says, "I have just got to cook dinner and I have got to clean the bathroom and I have got to dust in the living room and I have got to get [?] to his little league practice..." And this long list of stuff to do.

And I say, "Why, dear, I would like to help. I tell you what I am going to do. I am going to make supper for us. I don't want you to have to do all this stuff. That is a lot on your plate. I will make supper for us tonight."

And she says, "Thank you," because that is about all she expect. She says, "Thank you" and she goes and does all her work and I do my work and we come down and we sit down for dinner and there on her plate, like the rest of our plates is chili dogs and potato chips. Right?

"Look, hon, for you I did this."

We are supposed to do the unpleasant jobs.

Four years ago I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma and I have given this sermon enough to know that the next thing I should tell you is I am fine. Don't worry. I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma and within a matter of days I got a call from my friend Don Kaiser. He is one of the elders at Saint Peter Church. He is a good man. Don

lives in a log home that he built on 20 to 30 acres of land and much of that land he mows. And I know that because he complains about it all the time.

“It takes me eight hours to cut my grass. I have to spend every Saturday cutting my grass eight hours.”

He hates it. But when he called me he said, “R. C., you have got the Hodgkin’s Lymphoma. You have got a battle in front of you. I know that that is difficult. You are going to be going through chemotherapy. You are going to be worn out. But I want you to know something. One thing you are not going to have to worry about this season is I am going to make sure your grass gets cut. If I can’t get anybody else to do it, I will do it myself. I will cut your grass to make sure that is not something that you have to worry about.”

Now we had only been in our house for a year or two at this point. And we had about three acres of mowing on steep sides of the cliff kind of hills. And cutting my grass back then, because it was new and wasn’t very well grown in, it was sort of a connect the dots. You know, a little patch of weeds here and you go run over that with the mower and you look for the next patch of weeds. And as you are driving to the next patch of weeds there is this spot of dust. So you look like Pigpen riding on a Zamboni. It is a dusty, dirty, unpleasant job that my friend, even though he doesn’t like to do this, took on himself.

We are not only supposed to help each other. We are called here to do humble work for each other.

There is more here, too. We have to understand that while we are called to go and do likewise, Jesus says this in the text. “I want you to go and do likewise. You are not better than your master. Do the same thing.”

We have to understand that there is a limit to that. We have to understand that it would be blasphemy to suggest that any man or woman could somehow suffer or atone for the sins of another, that the cleansing element, that what that symbolizes, the death of Christ on our behalf, no one here can do for anyone else here.

We are not qualified. We are dead soldiers and we are all blemished sheep.

We can’t wash the brethren. We are sinners. We are dirty.

Friends, it would be foolish to forget on the other hand that in another context it certainly is possible for any man or any woman inside the kingdom of God to wash away the sins of others.

We do not atone for sins, but we wash one another’s sins, beloved, when we wash the feet of our brother when we cover their sins, when we send it far from us, when we remember it not.

While I was dealing with Hodgkin's Lymphoma Saint Peter Presbyterian Church also went through a church split, a nasty, ugly church split in which friends that I love, families that I served, children that I baptized went and testified and accused me and all the other elders of the church of wicked and heinous sins, falsely accused us of wicked and heinous sins. They had the completely wrong list.

Awful stuff. And they left. They couldn't submit to us as elders and they left and they started their own church and after saying these horrible things about us they would not bring charges because they had that whole evidence problem. It didn't keep them from making the accusations. They left and started their own church and a couple of months later the strangest thing happened. They started being nice.

Would you please, R.C., would you come to our daughter's wedding?

You want me to come to your daughter's wedding?

Yes, would you come to our daughter's wedding? We would like to take you out to supper. Can we take you out to supper?

Yeah. Do I have to be nice?

I mean, we were befuddled. We couldn't sleep. What were these people doing? The way these people talked about us, if we were as bad as they said we are, it is a sin for them to be friends with us. And just months after making all these horrible accusations they are wanting to be our friends?

Then I figured it out. I told the other elders, "Guys, you are not going to believe this. It is worse than you could possibly imagine. These people who slandered our good name, who made these awful, horrible accusations against us now have the gall to forgive us of what they falsely accused of. How do you like that? They are going to forgive us of the stuff we never did that they said we did."

I spent six months enraged at the hypocrisy and the wickedness of this. Six months it took for the Holy Spirit to help me understand that they were right and I was wrong.

When we are in relationship with each other and one of us does wrong to the other and then the other one does wrong back to us, the gospel is such that it is not necessary for us to call forth the supreme court to get the sin spectrometer machine out and to plug in every bit of information that we can so that some computer card spits out and says, "R.C., you have to forgive Kevin 37 percent and Kevin has to forgive you 23 percent." We don't do that.

If I can forgive someone for sinning against me when they don't know it, can't they forgive me for something I didn't actually do? Where is the harm here? If they would have washed my feet in the one spot where it is not dirty, what is the problem?

Beloved, our text here calls us to a humility that sees... that when we see the sins of others, our first response is to remember our own sins. We are called to humility that would rather see our brothers' feet clean than to raise the alarm. Dirty feet over here.

Humility, in short, doesn't just mean serving your brother, but forgiving him. How can we do that? How can we be that humble? How can we wash their feet clean when we are so certain that they are dirtier than ours? We do it, friends, by coming to this table.

At Saint Peter Presbyterian Church we celebrate the Lord's supper every week and we do it by coming forward row by row. And every one of us understands that when we stand up and come forward we are saying to the watching world, to the God of heaven and earth and to each other, "I crucified the Lord of glory."

You want to accuse me of something? That is what I am guilty of. I crucified the Lord of glory.

Now how can I come forward saying to my neighbors in my pews, "I crucified the Lord of glory, but you better not judge me. You better not accuse me of anything. And, boy, [?], when you sin against me and you don't ask me to forgive you, I crucify the Lord of glory."

There is more. We don't come to this table just to remember what sinners we are. We come to this table to taste the reality that we are joint heirs with him. We come to this table so that we might know that in our regeneration we have come from God, because he came for us. We come to this table knowing that we are going to God.

Should I be in the least bit concerned if a bunch of people think I am guilty of something I am not when the God of heaven and earth says to me here, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. Enter into your reward."

I have been given all things in Christ Jesus. I am a joint heir with him. He has declared me clean. That is how I can be humble.

We know these things and we come to this table. Blessed are we if we do them.

Let's pray.

*Our good and gracious Father, cause us to know our sin. Cause us, oh Lord, to drown in your grace, to put to death our pride and to be raised as heirs. Father, you have chosen us, a people of dirty feet to make us your own. Now as we come and feast with you, make us remember and make us rejoice. Make us forgive. For we ask it in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.*