

## Most 'Umble Mr. Canterbury!

John 13:1-17

Do you ever wish you were "successful", a celeb? That you were taken around in a chauffeur driven car, and lived in a beautiful country mansion? Do you ever wish that OK or Hello magazine cared about your exciting news, or that you were welcomed by the peak of High Society? Do you ever wonder what it would be like to control an international organisation? We all like success stories! You know the kind of thing I mean! Warehouse boy joins the Board or Commoner Kate marries Prince and of course with the advent of reality TV shows: unknown actor hailed as superstar. Stories of ordinary people who have done extraordinary things with their lives. It often seems that their "success" is more due to luck than good judgement - the right place at the right time - but they would say they've made it beyond their wildest dreams.

On the face of it Jesus Christ didn't have much of a success story at all. He was born in a borrowed stable and went to a borrowed grave. By His death on the cross, society labelled Him a 'common criminal'. But God's measure of success is different than our own. For Jesus told His disciples that "successful Christians" should not be measured by their fame or finance or power....but by their humility. He said 'The greatest one among you must be like the servant and the leader like the slave'.

Uriah Heap's protestation of loyalty: 'most 'umble' was not true humility but a cloak from his misdeeds. False humility sends the world away dissatisfied with those who call themselves Christians. True Humility is as Jesus embodied it: and just in case they (the disciples then) or us (now) missed the point the Kings of Kings knelt down and washed His disciples' feet.

As we journey with John to the Cross: we see him focus in on Jesus and what he said and did far more than the other gospels (we would see Jesus!): his public ministry was now

concluded and now he concentrates on preparing His disciples which is hugely significant for them and now for us. So there is no mention of the Last Supper: Bishop John of Ephesus recounts what he on reflection felt to be the hugely significant act of foot washing. 2 Chronicles 7:14 highlights the need first and foremost to humble ourselves. Pride was/is/and always will be an issue that spoils the effectiveness of believers and congregations and one of the devil's most potent weapons!

Palestinian roads were either inches deep in dust (when dry) or liquid mud (when wet). The servant would wash feet when travellers arrived but none were available. The Disciples seemed more interested in arguing about the best seats in the Kingdom than doing the work of a slave (Matthew 20 /Mark10 /Luke22) so Jesus took off his outer garment, put a towel around his waist and washed His disciple feet. Teaching by example is always the best way.

#### Jesus first gives an example of Humility (v1-5)

John tells us that Jesus knew it was time to go home to the Father: yet (as the songs says) He laid aside His Majesty became like a slave and humbled himself even to death on the Cross: the Early Church hymn recorded in Philippians 2:5-11 celebrates this truth. The Father had given Him complete power: yet later He was prepared to submit to the insignificant authority of the cruel and vacillating Pontius Pilate. He had come from God and was going to God: yet conscious of His own majesty and authority He deliberately washed His Disciples feet: He was willing to pour out His life unto death (Isaiah 53:12).

#### A Call for Humility (v6-17)

Now here's the rub: Jesus says to you and me that it's not enough to call Him Teacher and Lord, not enough to admire His example of humility. He calls us to follow His example: 'Put on the apron of humility' (1Peter 5:5 TEV).

The Humility of Receiving: Often a deeper mark of humility is to receive something than do something. Instinctively we seek to do something for God than receive from him or others....

Are you going to wash my feet Lord?! Jesus explains that Peter won't fully understand this until later....but insists....

If I do not wash your feet....you will no longer be my disciple (v8). Peter, true to form, blurts out impulsively: hands, head and feet (perhaps 1 Peter 5 was his response to this particular experience). But Jesus stretches their hearts and minds and ours still further: one could say that the washing of the disciples feet was symbolic of the cleansing from sin we must receive daily/hourly from Christ. The Greek word for bath (Iouo) means to bath before a meal, whereas the Greek word for wash (nipto) means to reach the house and have your feet washed. Jesus reminds us that when we become a Christian (united with Christ) we were Born Again, completely washed and accepted by God and began experiencing a brand new life and relationship. But He also shows us here what most of us have become lax at: our need to daily confess our sins and seek His forgiveness (Its not just an Anglican thing). You see we need the dirt of the world to be washed off less it spoil our relationship with Him (1John 1:9). Our but...I am a mature Christian...I don't need to daily surrender myself to Christ at the foot of the Cross? Yes I do: yes you do, and yes the fact that we don't makes the Devil rub his hands with glee as he retains his claws in us.

I think that Maturity: if that's truly where you are at, makes you more honest with God and more aware of your need for cleansing than ever before.

The Humility of serving

'I, your Lord and Teacher, have just washed your feet; you also should wash one another's feet.' Or to put it another way: 'I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you'.

At the heart of fruitful discipleship is serving. I don't know what your experience is but when looking for emerging leaders within the Body of Christ: their character and their servant heart are the first things I look for.

A Member of Parliament took his 8 year old daughter to visit Westminster Abbey. The awesomeness of it struck the little girl. As she stood looking up at the columns and studying its beauty and grandeur, her father said, Sweetheart, what are you looking thinking?' She said, 'Daddy, I was thinking how big you seem at home, and how small you look in here.' God's presence has a way of humbling us. And that's good, because when we empty ourselves God has a useful vessel. The Bible overflows with examples of those who did. Think about it....In his gospel, Matthew mentions his own name only twice. Both times he calls himself a tax collector. In his list of apostles, he assigns himself the eighth spot. John doesn't even mention his name in his gospel. The 20 appearances of the name 'John' refer to the Baptist. John simply calls himself 'the other disciple', or 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'. Luke wrote two of the most important books in the Bible, but never once penned his own name. Paul, the Bible's most prolific author, referred to himself as 'a fool' (2 Corinthians 12:11KJV). He also called himself 'the least of the apostles' (1 Corinthians 15:9KJV). Five years later he claimed to be 'less than the least of all saints' (Ephesians 3:8KJV). In one of his final epistles he referred to himself as 'the chief of sinners' (1 Timothy 1:15). As Paul grew older, his ego grew smaller. King David wrote no psalm celebrating his victory over Goliath. But he wrote a public psalm of penitence confessing his sin with Bathsheba (Psalm 51). So Saints: be humble says the Lord! The World needs to see a people who are different.

No matter how talented or successful we become, we all need a strong dose of servant hood. As you pursue your God-given destiny, be careful. Don't be so focused on what you love to do, that you neglect what needs to be done. A 3am nappy

change isn't exciting, nor is sweeping the garage or cutting the grass. Visiting the sick may not come naturally to you. Yet the sick need to be cared for, garages swept, grass cut, and nappies need changing.

Max Lucado writes: 'The World needs servants. People like Jesus who did not come to be served but to serve. He chose Nazareth over centre stage Jerusalem. His dad's carpentry shop over a marbled palace. And three decades of anonymity over a life of popularity. He selected prayer over sleep, flawed apostles over obedient angels. I'd have gone with the angels. Not Jesus. He picked people. When they feared the storm, He stilled it. When they had no money for taxes, He supplied it. He let a woman caught in adultery interrupt His sermon, a woman with a disease interrupt His schedule, and one with remorse interrupt His meal. Though none of the apostles washed His feet, He washed theirs. Though none of the soldiers at the cross begged for mercy, He extended it. And though His followers skedaddled like scared rabbits on Thursday, He came searching for them on Easter Sunday. The resurrected King ascended to Heaven only after He'd spent 40 days with His friends - teaching them, encouraging them...serving them.' Peter writes '...put on the apron of humility, to serve one another...' (1Peter 5:5 TEV). So who do you serve?

Jesus entered the world to serve. And we should enter our jobs, our homes and our churches - to serve. Servant-hood requires no unique skill or university degree. 1. To serve is to love the overlooked. Jesus sits in your classroom wearing thick glasses, outdated clothing and a sad face. You've seen Him. He works in your office. Or pregnant again she shows up late and tired. No one knows the father. Water cooler rumours say even she doesn't. You've seen her. When you love the misfit and befriend the hurting, you love Jesus. Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored...you did it to me.'(Matthew 25:40TM) 2. To serve is to

wave the white flag. We fight so much. 'Where do you think all these appalling wars and quarrels come from?' asks James, 'Do you think they just happen? Think Again. They come about because you want your own way...' (James 4:17TM). Real servants don't struggle they submit. 3. To serve is to do something each day that you don't want to do. Pick up someone's litter. Surrender your parking place. Call that long-winded relative. It doesn't have to be a big thing. Helen Keller once told the Tennessee Legislature that when she was young she longed to do great things and could not, so she decided to do small things in a great way. Don't be too big to do something small.' ....Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for Him is a waste of time or effort' (1 Corinthians 15:58TM).

Jesus finishes our reading with words that challenge all our bluster and feigned good intentions: 'Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them (v17)'. Ultimately you and I know that the real reason we have not yet reached the destiny Christ has for our life is our lack of acting on what God asks of us, doing what He commands us, following the Master whatever the cost. Not only does fruitfulness flow from obedience but also blessing: blessed so that you and I can be a blessing to others.

And just in case we have missed the point the Kings of Kings knelt down and washed His disciple's feet.

Pastor David

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