

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

In the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, there is an account of a dispute among the disciples as to which one of them would be the greatest. Our gospel writer this evening, John, doesn't record this, but he tells of an action taken by Jesus that rebukes their lack of humility more than any words could have done. Of course I'm referring to the account of the feet washing. Now we should not take this account of the feet washing, which is actually the beginning of a pretty long section called the Farewell Discourse, as nothing more than a reaction to petty-minded disciples. I say this because it's a significant action and it sets the tone for everything that follows, foreshadowing the cross itself, our Lord's humility as he washes the feet of his disciples, giving them an example of selfless service, which they must follow.

Adding to the significance is the fact that the feet washing takes place during their meal, it wasn't done on arrival when feet washing would normally be done. This shows it wasn't an act of simple courtesy as feet washing would usually be considered. What Jesus does is a parable in action setting forth the principle, the great principle of lowly service, which brings cleansing and finds its embodiment in the cross. This also shows that it is necessary for a disciple, then and now, to take Jesus' way, not his or her own.

A lot of folks take this story as basically a lesson in humility, overlooking Jesus' dialogue with Peter which obscures its significance. Jesus' words spoken in the shadow of the cross, have to do with cleansing, a cleansing without which no one belongs to Christ. In other words, there is no place in his fellowship for those who have not been cleansed by Jesus' atoning death.

Here let me quote from an author named D. A. Carson. Carson writes concerning a standard of love we explore throughout our pilgrimage in discipling, "The more we recognize the depth of our own sin, the more we recognize the love of the Savior; the more we appreciate the love of the Savior, the higher his standard appears; the higher his standard appears, the more we recognize in our selfishness, our innate self-centeredness, the depth of our own sin." In other words, with a standard like that of Jesus, no true believer can say I am keeping the basic stipulation of the new covenant because we begin to see the depth of our own sin.

Then in our gospel for this evening we move to Jesus' instruction about love. Here's a new thing, a thing that Christianity brought into the world, "that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." This is love within the community of believers, call it the marching orders for the newly gathering messianic community, love that the community of believers have for one another on account of Christ's great love for them, for us. Even two thousand years later, you and I are part of a new community, a community created on the basis of Jesus' work for us, because the love of Christ's friends for Christ's sake was a new thing in the world.

This isn't just the standard that is Jesus and his love, Jesus gives us an example that reflects the relationship of the love that exists between God the Father and God the Son, it is bring us in community, unity, such as that between Jesus and his Father. This is a privilege that proclaims the truth of God before a watching world. Jesus sets the example, calling on his disciples, on you and I, to follow in his footsteps. He doesn't ask us to do any more than he has done. Now consider this carefully my friends, this is the distinguishing mark of Christ's followers, if, and only if, they, we love one another, and it is Jesus' death and resurrection that really show us what love is.

AMEN