

## "Jesus: Washer of Feet and Cleanser of Souls!"

John 13:2-14

13 March Anno Domini 1994

The Baptism of Chelsey & Tana Fraser

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Emmett, Idaho

Pastor Michael L. McCoy

*Worthy is the Lamb Who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing! Amen.*

Dear friends in Christ, on Monday morning, thirteen days ago, I was sitting in my office at the parsonage trying to figure out what would be the sermon text for this very special day here at Our Redeemer. Nothing would come and I had determined that I would have to put this off for a couple of days. My plans changed.

Out in the living room I heard my wife reading a book to Chelsey about going to Church. During the course of this reading and discussion, it was explained to her that when they came to Church today, baby Tana would be baptized by having a few drops of water sprinkled over her head. Then Chelsey would be baptized by having a little water poured over her head. Her response was, "I already took a bath."

When I heard those words from that little girl, I instantly knew what the sermon text would be for this day -- for those words expressed exactly what Jesus said on the very night before His crucifixion. So, dear people of God, listen to the Gospel of John, chapter 13, verses 2-14 as well consider the theme:

*.... Jesus: Washer of Feet and Cleanser of Souls!*

*And supper being ended, the devil having already put it 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 had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this." Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "You are not all clean." When He had washed their feet, and taken His place, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and LORD; and you are right for so I am. If I then, your LORD and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.*

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

The scene is the room where the LORD's Supper was celebrated. Jesus and His disciples had walked from Bethany and immediately went to the upper room which a friend of Jesus had reserved for them. They untie their sandals or simply slip them off as they enter. Evidently it was entirely private with no host present to welcome and no servant at hand to remove sandals and wash feet. Yet, there in that room was a water jug, a basin, and a large towel. Those items remained untouched. The washing of feet was not required by the Law nor even by the traditions of the Pharisees. It was simply a matter of courtesy.

The scene is set and all the participants are in place. Our LORD and His disciples have entered the upper room. None of the 12 volunteers to do the servant's work; each declined to stoop beneath the rest. Each had their own thoughts. Judas had made arrangements to betray the LORD. The supper on this Passover was now ended and the 12 disciples are reclining and considering, each in his own mind, what these events all meant. They knew that the critical events were unfolding and that the LORD would be betrayed, handed over to the authorities, and killed. The cross was ahead and they all knew it. And *Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands* now did a most remarkable thing.

Here the LORD and Creator of the Universe -- the LORD of lords and the King of kings continues to amaze us. It must have been so for the disciples as well, for John has given us such a detailed account in our text. Surely these events were impressed upon John's memory because he felt so deeply the guilt of all the disciples in bringing it to pass that Jesus, their own LORD and Master, found it necessary to stoop to this lowest service of washing feet. *Jesus rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.*

*The Father had given all things into His hands* -- all authority in heaven and on earth were in Jesus' hands -- the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory were in His hands -- here this night He's got the whole world in His hands. On that night your life and mine, your future and mine, and your eternity and mine were in His hands. And what do we find those hands doing? At this moment He takes a towel and a basin of water and begins the menial task of the lowest servant and washes the feet of the disciples. What are those hands going to do? In a few short hours, they will be pierced by nails. Jesus takes care of the physical dirt, but more importantly, He provides the cleansing for all of our souls. *Jesus, Who, in the very essence of God, did not count equality with God robbery, but emptied Himself, and taking the form of a servant ... He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.* Here He takes water and washes the disciples' dusty feet; shortly He will pour out His own Blood to wash sinful souls.

He comes to the betrayer, Judas Iscariot. Although Judas had already planned the betrayal to be signaled by a kiss, Jesus stooped to wash the feet of Judas. In contrast with the traitorous action of Judas and the hellish powers that stood in back of this action, AND although Jesus knew that all things were in His hands in these hours hastening toward His death, He did not smite the traitor and the foes in league with this son of Satan, but our LORD followed His course of sacrificial love, completed His mission, and of Himself laid down His life to take it up again. Even the forces of hell and Satan's cohorts cannot interfere with the servant love which Jesus shows to the very last. So Judas has his feet cleansed by the LORD, but remains unclean in his soul even though such cleansing had been provided for it as well.

*Then Jesus came to Simon Peter.* Evidently Peter was not the first, although we have no means of knowing how many were washed before Jesus came to him, nor does it make any difference. *And Peter said to Him, "Lord, are You going to wash my feet?"* Those whose feet were washed before him voiced no protest. Peter's temperament is different, more impetuous than that of most people, by nature he is quicker to speak and to act.

*Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this."* Jesus points out to Peter that his objection rests on ignorance, an ignorance which shall be replaced by full understanding in due time. In a way, Jesus is excusing Peter and treats him mildly. By adding the promise that Peter will later realize what Jesus is really doing, not just in the washing of feet, but what He is doing during these last hours of His life, He is asking Peter, and making it easy for him, to submit without misgivings or question. In other words, the reply of our LORD is full of love and kindness.

The crucifixion, the resurrection, and the glorification of Jesus will shed much light on everything that was now taking place. Especially on Pentecost will the full understanding of these present things be made known. It is as if Jesus said, "Peter, you and the others do not fully understand what is happening during these hours. This washing of your feet by Me is only one of the things you do not and cannot understand right now. I accept that, but I must continue."

*Peter said to Him, You shall never wash my feet!* Never, in all eternity, never is Jesus to wash Peter's feet! In contrast to the gentle, kind, and loving words of Jesus, Peter speaks with boldness, brashness, and self-authority. He acts as if he were the LORD and Jesus is subject to his orders. In Peter we have the opposite of the betrayer. Judas had feet washed by the LORD but remained with an unclean heart. Peter's heart is clean by the Word of God's forgiveness, but his feet will remain quite dirty if the only way they will be cleaned is by Jesus.

Here is another point of application for us. Human beings do not, by nature, want God to do anything for them. People in the US like to think of themselves as do-it-yourselfers. That is particularly true for us westerners and especially true for those of us living in Idaho. We tend to be rugged individualists. We will do for ourselves. Unfortunately, that determined resoluteness carries over into the spiritual realm. "God, You tell me what I have to do in order to be saved, and to go to heaven. Go ahead, God, tell me. I can take it. I'll work at it and show You." And God says, "*Thou shalt be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.* You are to be absolutely perfect -- no sins allowed, either sins of deeds, sins of words, or even sins of your very thoughts. The entrance requirement into heaven complete and total perfection from the moment of your conception to the moment of your death."

It is then that we immediately say, "Look God, nobody's perfect, no one can keep Your Law, God," and, we are right, and, God knows that we can't do it, and we know that if it were up to us no one would be saved, and God knows it, and, that's why He sent His Son. *In the fullness of time God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption.*

This morning Chelsey and Tana were received as children of God through Baptism. What they couldn't do, what neither you nor I could do, was done for us and given to us. As God's children they now have an inheritance of eternal life, salvation, and heaven itself. Jesus accomplished this for each one of us. What we couldn't do, He has done for us. But how did He do it?

Well, dear people, look at Him. He, upon Whose head should be the crown of all creation, wears and bears a crown of thorns. Please, look at Him. He Whose throne is in heaven and Whose footstool is the earth, is enthroned upon a cross with manmade spikes. Again, look at Him. The Son of God, Whose bed ought to be that of a King, comes to earth, finds no place to rest His head which He can call His own, and borrows a tomb in which He reclines for three days following His crucifixion. Look at what He is doing. He Whose thong on sandal we are not worthy to untie, is bending low to take dirty feet in hand and wash them clean.

Is it any wonder that Jesus, with basin of water and towel in hand, looks at Peter and says, *"If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."* But listen carefully to what Jesus says and what He does not say to Peter. He does not say, *unless I wash your feet.* Rather, He says, *If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.* "If you will not believe that I have humbled Myself for you, you have no part in Me. I will wash you with what I am doing for you. I will cleanse you with my suffering and death." Jesus makes Peter's having part with Him depend, not on anything Peter does, but on something that Jesus does for Peter -- *If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.*

Frightened at the thought of having no part in Jesus and thinking that he now understands, Peter, in his own irrepressible style, not only gives up his opposition, but now goes to the other extreme, *Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!* In his haste Peter does not distinguish between the spiritual washing of which Jesus speaks, and the washing of feet in which Jesus is presently engaged.

*If then I, your LORD and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.* Last Wednesday morning I asked the members of the adult Bible class if they were given the choice of having feet washed or washing feet, which would they choose. Every one of the adults chose washing someone else's feet. They would rather serve than be served. And indeed, such serving is good and pleasing. But the thought of someone else washing our feet is not a choice we would make.

I would imagine that if I were to ask a three-year old if I could wash his feet, he would most likely say, "Okay." And if asked if the three-year old would wash your feet, he would most likely say, "Okay" and do it. The older we become, the more we lose the childlike faith to believe and to serve. If a teenager were given the option, my guess would be that the teenager would choose to have someone else wash his or her feet, and not care to wash your feet. But us grownups do not want to be served. We become like Peter and say, "You will never wash my feet." We lose something as we become older adults and the words of Jesus should strike home, *Unless you become as little children you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven.*

It is easy for the LORD to set Peter right. *Jesus said to him, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "You are not all clean."*

They had assembled for worship, people coming together from all walks of life -- fishermen, tax collector, zealot, and thief. Not all who congregated had a cleansed soul. Judas was there and he did not. He let Jesus wash his feet, but the cleansing needed for his heart and soul was rejected. Those of you who have gathered this day have heard the Word of Life which is able to cleanse your souls -- for some of you that cleansing first took place 90 years ago and more. For others, it today may have been the day it was cleansed for the first time.

If you believe that Jesus humbled Himself and did so in order to serve you, to wash your soul, then rest assured, it has already happened to you. That cleansing has taken place through the spoken Word proclaimed to you. If you were to be baptized it would be an affirmation of God's love for you -- His seal of approval. For the littlest ones, like Tana, it comes by the washing of water with the Word in Holy Baptism, with the faith that God requires He gives in Baptism.

Jesus told Peter, *He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean.* Those words sound like the words I heard at the parsonage when that little girl said, "I already took a bath." The psalmist said, *O LORD, out of the mouths of babes and infants, Thou hast ordained praise.* And the Christ Himself said, *Unless you become as little children you can not inherit the Kingdom of God.* The model of faith is the littlest baby brought to Jesus. "I already took a bath." There is no doubt in my mind that those two girls came to church this morning having had baths. There is also no doubt in my mind that they will go home this afternoon with souls that are cleansed.

The Bible tells us that *the promise is for you and for your children.* The invitation is extended to all. If you or your children have not been baptized, now is the best time -- today is the best day. The baptismal font still has water in it and the LORD's Word still has power in it. Is there anyone here who has not been baptized into the Name of the Holy Trinity, and who, after having heard the Word of God's Good News, wants to have the blessing of Baptism?

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts, minds, and souls in Christ Jesus, ...

... *Washer of Feet and Cleanser of Souls!*