

Pause, Then Proceed (Week 6) - Serve  
**Yesterday's Sermon Summary**

1. What are some of your most vivid memories? Odds are that some of them are from moments when you were surprised or your expectations were blown. We often remember such moments in great detail. And while it's very hard to change someone's deeply-held beliefs, surprise can do it, making it one of humanity's greatest teachers.



2. One of the most surprising events of Holy Week is the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet ([John 13.2-17](#)). While footwashing was a common courtesy for guests in your home or business in the ancient world, guests were expected to do it themselves or perhaps a servant might do it for them. A revered teacher and rabbi like Jesus would never be expected to do it. Yet Jesus did. Hence Peter's shock and refusal in [verses 6-9](#).

3. A second surprise is that Jesus washed their feet DURING dinner (not when the disciples initially gathered). There were 30, 40, or more present for the Passover that evening, and at some point during the meal Jesus would have made His way around the room, washing their feet one by one in silence.

4. Rev. Jan Richardson, a United Methodist pastor famous for her "Painted Prayerbook," writes about this event, "As Jesus worked to convey what He most wanted His companions to know on that fateful night, He does not start with spoken words. Instead, He takes a towel, a basin, and water...Perhaps more than anything Jesus could say that evening – and He goes on to say quite a lot – this washing speaks loudest of all. It is the vocabulary of action. It is something His disciples would never forget."

5. So what's the key idea that Jesus is trying to communicate through the surprise of the footwashing? Answer - Jesus is showing His followers how to relate both to Him and each other. And the commonality between those two is serving and being served.

6. First, let's focus what the story tells us about our relationship with Jesus. Focus in on [verses 8-9](#) in which Jesus tells Peter that if Jesus doesn't wash his feet, Peter will have "no share" with Him. To have "no share" means to not be in the same place as Jesus, or, worse, have no part of Him. So in order to be with or near Jesus, we have to let Him serve us - and in a most personal way (like footwashing).

7. Why does this matter? Because as American Christians we often are so intent on serving Christ that we forget that half of our relationship with Him is Christ serving us. As shocking as this may be to consider, it shouldn't be - Christ regularly described Himself as a servant in the gospels ([Mark 10.45](#); [Luke 22.27](#)), and later Christians would do the same ([Philippians 2.5-11](#), note verse 7 especially and its use of the word "slave/servant").

8. So how does footwashing frame how Jesus' disciples should relate to each other? First, recognize that footwashing in the ancient world is customary, routine, and ordinary; it is hardly a remarkable or heroic act. So when Jesus tells His followers to wash each other's feet, ([verse 14](#)) He is asking us take on a "ministry of the mundane," choosing to serve one another in small, seemingly-insignificant ways day in and day out.

9. Among Jesus' followers, all should wash and be washed, serve and be served. As one writer puts it, all of Christ's disciples should have "wet hands and feet." This key is characterized by both: we give to others, and we receive from others, we serve others, and we are willing to be served in small ways by others.

10. In our Lenten devotional, Trevor Hudson writes of this story, "Jesus Himself models service when He washes the dirty feet of His disciples. Through this act, Jesus gives the disciples a pattern to follow." At the end of the footwashing, Jesus says in verse 17, "If you know these things (what I've told you just now about footwashing), you are blessed if you do them." That single verse is our hope - if we choose to let Christ serve us, and serve each other mutually, what blessings might that bring that cannot come any other way?

### **A Prayer for the Next Few Days**

Adapted from Rev. Dr. Nigel Varndell (Anglican Bishop)

*Lord God, I scarcely understand why Your Son, our Lord, would do something that to us seems so beneath Him. He who is the Messiah stooped low in humility to wash His own disciples' feet.*

*This story shows us that we get so much wrong about Christ and what it means to be His disciples. I too easily forget that the first will be last, and the greatest will be the servant of all.*

*Maybe this episode is meant to put me in my rightful place? Maybe I'm supposed to be awed by the King of Kings who kneels, so much so that I am moved to follow His example? And maybe like our Savior I am to serve and offer hospitality to those who may not deserve it?*

*In light of such grace, lowliness, and kindness, may my only response be praise, thanks, and the commitment to live likewise, amen.*