

Frequently in our weekly notice sheet we will see notices asking people if they can help with things. In recent times help has been needed doing Songpro in the services, help with welcoming before services, help at Messy church and many other areas. Now we are not unusual as a church in often asking for helpers or volunteers. There may be many reasons why we are short of helpers or why people don't volunteer. Often we find ourselves short on time and with many other commitments. However one major reason is that often we have not learnt to serve. We have not come to Jesus and learnt from the master about serving.

I remember once going to see some friends. The Dad was busy doing some DIY and his son was helping him. The boy was about 5 and he had his own little tool belt and he watched his Dad carefully passing tools and screws and so on. He was learning as he did not just about what his Dad was doing but about helping and serving.

What we see in this passage from John 13 is Jesus calling his disciples to service. However the clear message through this passage is that we cannot serve Christ unless we have been served by him. That is we need to come to the Master and learn from him how to serve.

In our series under the title 'as you come to him' we have jumped on from John 5 to John 13 and to these last hours of Jesus life. The disciples and Jesus are gathered for their Passover meal.

There they were relaxed having a meal. There would have been a low table in the centre and these men would have been lying down with their heads closest to the table and feet to the outside. No one had performed the normal task of washing their feet before the meal, part of the ritual cleansing for any Jew before eating. So Jesus took the role of the servant and began to wash the feet of his disciples.

It doesn't seem to have brought about any reaction until he came to Peter. Then as we read in vs6-8 Peter was loath to have Jesus perform this service for him and with his seemingly normal impetuosity says "you shall never wash my feet". Jesus response was very telling for Peter and for us, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

### **1. The essential service**

Now I wonder what you think Jesus meant by those words? Some have linked it to baptism because of the reference to washing but that seems to me to be missing the point.

In v1 John gives us the context and that is the imminent death of Jesus. But also the context of Jesus' love for these disciples. What we see in these verses is an acted parable of the cross.

Jesus was symbolically making the disciples physically clean. Later on the cross he would provide them the opportunity to be made spiritually clean. This footwashing was a symbol of that great cleansing.

What Jesus was spelling out to Peter here and through him to all others who might want to be part of Jesus, that is to have a relationship with Jesus, to share in eternal life with him, we need to be made clean not of the dust of the world but of the sin of our lives and that can only be through the cross. Yes the cross was still hours away but here we begin to see how much Jesus loved these disciples including Judas who would betray him and Peter who would deny him because he washed their feet. It was a symbolic act representing the blood that he would shed on their behalf to offer them forgiveness of their sins. Unless you are clean you can have no part in me. It was true for Peter and it is true for us. It is only by the death of Jesus that we can enter the presence of God only his death can make us clean. Here is God's great love for us. But then note how Peter reacts.

His immediate reaction is to reject Jesus' offer – v8. Jesus was the Master and the leader it was inappropriate for him to do this task. All Peter could see was the immediate situation and to him it was wrong. But Jesus knew that this was why he had come. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

This is the essential service of Jesus that we must accept if we would be part of him. We can only be Jesus followers, God's children if we accept this essential service of Jesus through his death on the cross in our place. Unless we allow as it were to wash us clean with his blood we have no part in him.

Now I know that for many and perhaps some here or listening on download our immediate reaction to being told Jesus died for us is to say in effect "that's very kind but I didn't ask him to and I don't need him to." You are thinking I'm alright. I don't need to be made clean. I live a pretty good life surely that's enough for God. Unfortunately I think many are affected by our self-service society and so like Peter we struggle to accept Jesus doing something for us.

The reaction of many today is in effect to say, "yes Jesus I know you died for me but surely I don't need that. Surely all I need is to make sure I live a pretty good life, all I need is to make sure I go to church enough, all I need is to be well thought of by my family and friends", and so I could go on. You've heard the ideas as I have and perhaps you have thought these things and may still be thinking these things. I don't need Jesus to serve me I can make it on my own. Again the words of Jesus come back to us "Unless I wash you, you have no part in me." This is the way and the only way to enter his life, through the cross; the cross on which Jesus paid the penalty for our sin and because of which we are counted as clean. Don't think there is another way. There is not, there wasn't for Peter and there isn't for me or you. Don't think you don't need it because you do I do and Peter did. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and we all need to be made clean.

Are you aware that there is a car park in Farnborough that you can only get to on foot? It was built five years ago above a gym but the vehicle access has not yet been built. You can't get there in your

car. The way is not yet open. What we see here is that the way to eternal life is open. We can be part of Jesus with all that that means but only if we allow him to serve us through his death on the cross. Have you done that? Will you do that?

Jesus has served us through the sacrifice of his own life in our place on the cross and unless we accept him serving us we cannot be part of him and we cannot serve him.

God the Father wants us to be his children, Jesus wants us to be his followers but unless allow Jesus to serve us, unless we come to God through the cross we can have no share in his life.

Our series title is 'as you come to him' and here we are seeing that it is only as we come to Jesus the living stone that we can find forgiveness and the new life that God longs for us.

## **2. The ongoing need**

Peter's response to Jesus' words was as usual wholehearted, ""The Lord not just my feet but my hands and head as well". (v9)

Jesus reply is again intriguing "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean." (v10)

I'm in intrigued to wonder what having a bath meant at that time but more about what Jesus was saying.

I was intrigued to read in the paper this week the headline "I shower once a week and here's why you should too" with the subtitle, "Daily showering is expensive, polluting and unnecessary. The old-school weekly bath or shower – with a brief daily sink-wash – is healthier for the environment, and for us."

What was it that Jesus was saying to Peter? What he in effect said to Peter was "you are clean and so don't need another bath just to wash your feet." Are we any closer now to seeing what he meant?

How was Peter clean? Well Jesus was again looking ahead to the cross through which Peter would be made clean and acceptable to a holy God. One that had happened and he was clean then he would not need that kind of cleansing again but just to wash his feet, that part of him which was in contact with the world and so became dirty.

The death of Jesus deals with our sin once and for all. As you come to him you are made clean.

However our daily contact with a sinful world means we do need regularly to come to him and wash off the grime of the day.

Again Jesus is looking forward here to the cross and beyond but what he says to Peter is true for all of us. While our salvation or cleansing happens through the cross just once, we do need regularly to confess our sin and be restored. The other day I was doing some work in the garden and, as you can imagine, my hands were quite dirty. Then I remembered that there was a problem with the car. So I

lifted the bonnet adjusted the cam stops and cleaned the fan shaft bearings – oh alright I put some water in a little hole so that the windscreen washers worked but the end result was to add even more dirt to already dirty hands. That's how it can be in life sin piling up on sin and we become insensitive to it. One more doesn't matter. Daily confession helps us to see sin as sin. It stops us from pretending that this is our little foible or that this doesn't matter to God. As we come to him day by day in confession we are made to look at ourselves to see where we are going wrong we can confess and be made clean again.

If it helps think of it this way that it is a bit like serving in a cake shop you need clean hands. If we are to serve Jesus then we need to be clean. Through the cross he has made us clean what he said to Peter applies to us "And you are clean". However we need to ensure that we daily remove the dirt that has accrued in our lives and as it were wash our hands in confession that we may again be pure and holy fit to serve. Will you do that? Will you day by day come and seek God's forgiveness of that day's sins and be restored ready to do the will.

### **3. the common task**

Having washed their feet Jesus turned to his disciples and said, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." (v14&15) Now what was Jesus expecting them to do as a result. Well in one sense be willing to wash each other's feet. That often was what was needed during the day. That was the task of the servant and as we have already seen Jesus had spoken to them about his cross in terms of service. But was that all he expected? Seeing this in the light of the cross was all that he expected from them in his service to wash each other's feet? No of course not. The example he gave them was the example of humble service, yes shown in washing feet but shown more graphically on the cross. When he said "you should do" he meant they should be willing to serve each other no matter what it involved and no matter what the cost.

What does Jesus ask of you and I down the centuries if we have come to him and let him serve us what does he ask of us in return?

Well not that we wash people's feet. I have to say that I find the 'ceremony' of washing feet as it is done in the church a real anathema. It seems to be a show but more it misses the point. Washing feet was right then because they wore open sandals and so they needed it. We don't need it today and I don't think we have an equivalent today in terms of dealing with a person. However, cleaning the toilets or rolling up your sleeves and attacking a mound of greasy plates seems to me to bring the essence of humble service into our culture. But again the point is unless we have allowed Jesus to serve us, unless we recognise what God has done for us we will have no heart or stomach for what he is calling us to in terms of serving him as we serve others.

The servant King is calling us to come to him and be made clean and then in the light of that to daily be renewed that we might serve him in purity as we humbly serve others.

So we come back to where we began. This week there are opportunities to serve, at Messy church tomorrow helping the youngsters with their craft activities, putting out tables for tea, serving the meals, washing up afterwards. But then there are so many other opportunities for service, doing the flowers, welcoming, songpro, pa, C3Y on a Friday, prayer ministry.

As you come to him the living stone, the one who gave his life in service of you so he sends us out to be his servants yes in our church as I have mentioned but also in our homes, in our society and in our places of work. We are called by the servant king to be willing to roll up our sleeves and get our hands dirty in his service.