

Can I Help You With That?

John 13

Ephesians 5:31-32

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church.

Dr. Robertson McQuilkin writes this:

"It has been a decade since that day in Florida when Muriel, my wife, repeated to the couple vacationing with us the story she had told just five minutes earlier. *Funny*, I thought, *that's never happened before*. But it began to happen occasionally.

"When her memory deteriorated further, we went to Joe Tabor, a neurologist friend, who gave her the full battery of tests and, by elimination, confirmed that she had Alzheimer's. But because she had none of the typical physical deterioration, there was some question. We went to the Duke University Medical Center, believing we should get the best available second opinion. My heart sank as the doctor asked her to name the Gospels and she looked pleadingly at me for help. But she quickly bounced back and laughed at herself. She was a little nervous, perhaps, but nothing was going to get her down.

"Muriel never knew what was happening to her, though occasionally when there was a reference to Alzheimer's on TV she would muse aloud, 'I wonder if I'll ever have that?' It did not seem painful for her, but it was a slow dying for me to watch the vibrant, creative, articulate person I knew and loved gradually dimming out.

"But she still knows us—three years later. She cannot comprehend much, nor express many thoughts, and those not for sure. But she knows whom she loves, and lives in happy oblivion to almost everything else.

"She is such a delight to me. I don't have to care for her, I get to. One blessing is the way she is teaching me so much about love, God's love.

"As she needed more and more of me, I wrestled daily with the question of who gets me full-time? Muriel or Columbia Bible College and Seminary?

"When the time came, the decision was firm. It took no great calculation. It was a matter of integrity. Had I not promised, 42 years before, 'in sickness and in health...till death do us part'?

"This was no grim duty to which I stoically resigned, however. It was only fair. She had, after all, cared for me for almost four decades with marvelous devotion; now it was my turn. And such a partner she was! If I took care of her for 40 years, I would never be out of her debt."

Sacrificial devotion.

Faithfulness.

Love like no other.

An unselfish servant.

I wonder if Dr. McQuilkin really knows Jesus intimately?

I have no doubt that if I were to ever meet this man, I would be able to see the profound, limitless love of God in him.

What about you? Me? All of us?

Would we rise to the occasion like this man did (does) for his wife?

- would we be faithful?
- Sacrificial?
- Love like no other?
- An unselfish servant?

I wonder...

John 13:1-17

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and head as well!"

Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 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. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

It is thought that chapter 13 serves as a literary turning point in the Gospel of John. Some scholars believe that one can divide John's gospel into two parts:

1. the first being the Book of Signs (1-12)
2. the second being the Book of Glory (13-21)

In the book of signs, Jesus usually performs some kind of miraculous sign and then provides discourse & rhetoric – explanation of the signs.

For example, Jesus feeds the five thousand, then talks about himself being the bread of life, which is associated with manna in the OT for the Israelites as they were wandering in the desert.

Or Jesus talking about being the light of the world, then healing a blind man, then discussing spiritual blindness.

Come to think of it, Jesus was really intentional about the way he lived and taught. He always seemed to have a point to the things he did.

In the second half of John's gospel, lies the book of glory in which Jesus' journey to glorification on the cross begins.

John 13:1

Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave his world and go to the Father.

In the book of glory there is one sign, one event of momentous importance: Jesus' death on the cross.

It is in the opening of this book of glory that we see Jesus washing the feet of his disciples.

The backdrop of this love-act of Jesus is the Passover Feast... and we know from the Gospel of Luke that during the evening meal:

Luke 22:24

...there arose a dispute among them as to which of them was considered to be the greatest.

I see this in children all the time:

"Me, Me... pick Me!!"

"I want to go first!!"

"I'm better than you at dodgeball!!"

"Oh yeah! I can play football better!!"

They want to be the greatest, ever!!

I see this in adults, too, but we have learned to hide it better, haven't we?

We want to be great!

Noticed!

Appreciated for who we know ourselves to be, right?

To Jesus:

"It was heart-rending that this exhibition of pride should take place just at this juncture. These were men who had been with Him in His temptations, who had had the benefit of His most careful instructions, who had been exposed to the full influence of His personal character; and yet, notwithstanding all, the rock-bed of pride.

"Heedless of three years of example and teaching; unrestrained by the symptoms of our Lord's sorrow; unchecked by the memory of happy and familiar interaction, which should have bound them forever in a united brotherhood, they wrangled with high voices and hot faces, as to who should be first."

It is all in us to be first, isn't it?!

To be great?!

I mean why do we always want to sit in the front seat – SHOTGUN?!!
Or be the one that gets the glory or praise, rather than someone else?

It was even in the disciples and they were the closest to Jesus, physically!

Our parents even want us to be first and great!

Matthew 20:20-23

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

"What is it you want?" he asked.

She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"

"We can," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."

James and John's Mom wanted her two boys to be the "right" and "left" men right next to Jesus when He became King. I mean, what Mom wouldn't want that for her boys?

But she didn't know what she was asking... look deeper...

When was Jesus enthroned as King of this world? @ his crucifixion

Matthew 27:37

Above his head they placed the written charge against him: This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.

And who were the two people on Jesus' right and left during his crucifixion?

Matthew 27:38

Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.

Greatness...

Matthew 20:26

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.

Imagine, the GREAT one, Jesus, exemplifying a servant, a slave.

But wait... we are getting ahead of ourselves.

So Jesus and his disciples were about to share in the evening meal. But when they began to arrive there was no customary foot-washer person.

You see in that time and place, where people often walked in sandals down dusty roads and then reclined at low tables with their feet not far from the faces of other guests, custom required that a servant at the door wash dirty feet. Foot-washing was a token of hospitality when someone first entered a home. To fail to provide a servant was a breach of hospitality... even seen as a gesture of hostility.

At the very least, all our ancient sources show that foot-washing was a degrading and lowly task. When done by a wife (for her husband), a child (for his/her parents), or a pupil (for his/her teacher), it was always an act of extreme devotion. But since it was an act with social implications, in no way do we find those with a "higher" status washing the feet of those beneath them.

When one removes his outer clothing and wraps a towel around the waist, that person is adopting the posture of a slave.

Matthew 20:26

...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.

So the foot-washer didn't show...

Imagine:

"You're standing behind a pane of glass watching this scene. The first disciple enters the upper room and discovers there's no foot-washer. Suddenly, for him, it's decision time. Does he wash his own feet? Does he take off his garment and become like a rank-and-file servant (slave) and wash everyone else's feet? Look into his eyes. He's thinking: *Not me. That's not my job. I'm not a slave. I'm no foot-washer.*

"He tries to size up where Jesus will sit and chooses an advantageous position at the table.

"The second disciple enters, realizes there's no foot-washer and sees his friend already seated at the table. *Well,* he thinks, *if he's not going to stoop to the level of foot-washer, neither am I.* And he heads toward the second-best seat in the house.

"All the disciples do the same thing. They file in. Walk past the water basin. Choose the best remaining seat at the table. Recline. Stick their dirty feet in each other's laps.

"Last, Jesus enters. Watch him. He looks at the water. He looks at the filthy feet of the disciples. You can see it in his eyes. Three years, sermon after sermon, illustration after illustration, confrontation after confrontation. Can you see it? It looks a lot like failure.

"He walks to the table and reclines. He just sits there, silently. *Maybe someone will at least have the humility to wash the feet of their master.* But no, nobody moves.

"Now watch him. He gets up from the table, walks to the water basin and starts to take off his outer garment. Carefully he picks up the towel and slips it through his belt, exactly the way a common servant would. Then he pours the water into the basin.

"Now look at the eyes of the disciples. Disbelief. Embarrassment. Then as Jesus begins to wash the feet of the first disciple, you see something deeper in their eyes: agony, regret, maybe tears. *What is the matter with me? How did I miss this? My whole world revolves around me. It's bad enough I wasn't humble enough to wash my brother's feet. But I wouldn't even wash my Savior's feet! How could I have done this? What's the matter with me?*

"Jesus circles the table. Peter resists for a moment, but Jesus knows well how to silence Peter. When he finishes his task, Jesus folds the towel and puts it back. He slips on his robe, walks back to the table and reclines."

John 13:12-17

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 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. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

Jesus is saying:

"Hey!

Do you see what I have done for you?

I became a servant, a slave, for you!

I washed your feet!

Now do it for each other!

And if you do...you will be blessed."

Okay...

At this point in the service we are all going to take off our shoes and socks, bring out the water and towels and wash some feet!

And some of you are getting really nervous at this point ☺.

No we are not going to literally wash feet...

But I would like to ask you to please take off your shoes... go ahead. It's okay. Think of this as your living room, a place where you would feel comfortable taking off your shoes. It may feel a little weird. But that's okay.

Now with our shoes off, let's get real with each other. We are going to think about what Jesus just did in this story and the implications. Meaning, we are going to get practical:

Students (children & teenagers):

- let other people go first
 - in line
 - getting food somewhere
 - on the playground
 - in a car
 - watching a movie or TV show that someone else wants to watch
- share

Adults:

- when you are driving, put other people first
- at work
 - who are you stepping on (or over) to get ahead?
 - are you completely honest in your business dealings?
 - do people often mistake you for Jesus at work?
 - what is your reputation?
- in your marriage
 - is it all about you?
 - are you self-centered?
 - is it your way or no way?
 - do you try to sabotage your relationship because things are not going your way

Church people:

- Why do you serve?
 - For the glory of it... recognition?
 - Or for Jesus?
- Why don't you serve?
 - Is it inconvenient?
 - Is it all about you and not others?

Serving one another will bring you the greatest joy in your life!! I guarantee it! Actually, Jesus guarantees it!

John 13:17

"Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

It is the only way to truly live!

I know, it doesn't make sense, or it doesn't seem to be worth it...

But it's true!

Just try it!

I want to challenge you for the next six month (at least) to try this going-out-of-your-way style of serving, just like Jesus. Walk around with a servant towel around your arm and be ready. Open your eyes. Opportunities to serve exist all around you. Open car doors, or doors into stores. Say thank you to someone who does it for you. Sit in the backseat of the car. Take out the garbage, even if it isn't your turn. Help people. Go out of your way to serve. Take advantage of every opportunity to serve—even if it seems like something insignificant.

And then monitor the condition of your heart, week to week. You will notice something different. Your heart will change. You will look different. Ask yourself: Am I gaining, or losing?

I must warn you, however, people don't always appreciate service. For whatever reason (pride, mostly), your efforts may not always be received well. And you may not get thanked. Many times I have delayed entrance into a building, or a store, to hold the door open for people who are walking in and have received nothing for the service. No recognition or simple thank you. I could become bitter, or I could continue to serve them in spite of themselves...
...for the sake of Jesus.

And you may get tired... or even burned out. What happens then? Let's ask Dr. McQuilkin...

"Cindi, a student wife who have sort of adopted Muriel and I, asked me this question once: 'Don't you ever get tired?'

"Tired? Every night. That's why I go to bed."

"No, I mean tired of ..." and she tilted her head toward Muriel, who sat silently in her wheelchair, her vacant eyes saying, 'No one at home just now.' I responded to Cindi's question, 'Why, no, I don't get tired. I love to care for her. She's my precious.'

"Well, I certainly would," said Cindi.

"Cindi and her husband are handsome, healthy, smart people, and yet she admits that it is hard constantly to affirm one another. What happens when there is so little to commend? How does love make a difference?

"Love is said to evaporate if the relationship is not mutual, if it's not physical, if the other person doesn't communicate, or if one party doesn't carry his or her share of the load. When I hear the litany of essentials for a happy marriage, I count off what my bebed can no longer contribute, and I contemplate how truly mysterious love is."

Dr. McQuilkin doesn't get anything in return. He gets no daily pats on the back, an encouragement card in the mail, even an "I love you" any longer from his wife of 40+ years.

He doesn't do it for praise for himself. He does it for Muriel, and for the glory of God. Robertson McQuilkin does it for Jesus. This man has his servant towel ready at all times, and he's not afraid to use it. That's representing Jesus!!

Which begs the question:

Will we be the representatives of Jesus in this world?

...in our community?

...in our workplaces?

...in our families?

...in our relationships?

This last Wednesday I received a call from an elderly woman who requested some lawn cleanup at her house. Could the church help?

That evening at youth group, I posed the question to the junior high students. A dozen hands readily agreed to help out at the last minute. So, on Thursday afternoon, about eight junior high boys, with rakes in hand and an agenda to please the Lord, cleaned up this woman's yard. One boy made this comment: "I know we are doing this to help this lady, but this is really fun!!" The energy and the excitement these boys brought to serving this elderly woman was invigorating to my heart. They exemplified what it means to be a servant.

Will you take the challenge of Jesus to serve one another, to wash one another's feet? I hope so... and so does he.

Let's pray...

Benediction—

You must be washed yourself, Jesus does this...

It is remarkable that Jesus washed Judas' feet...