

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

October 11, 2026

In His Steps – A Stewardship Series
“Towel Service”
John 13:1-17
Rev. Mike Toluba

For many years, our home church took our youth group to Night of Joy at Disney World. It was a night of Christian music concerts across the Magic Kingdom from the late afternoon to the early hours of the next morning. It's a lot like what Rock the Universe is today at Universal Studios. Our youth leader and one of our best friends, Pat, also worked part-time at our local Disney Store at the time. It was a well-known fact that many Disney World employees considered Night of Joy as one of the worst shifts to work during the entire year. Imagine thousands upon thousands of teenagers and limited adult supervision.

Pat and I decided to devote our night at Night of Joy on this particular year to making it better than the worst time of the year. We served teenagers by holding doors and allowing them ahead of us in line. We started the night to see how fast we could get 100 teenagers ahead of us in line. It quickly turned into hundreds and well into the thousands very quickly. We served Disney employees by offering words of affirmation and encouragement. We cleaned up trash left behind. I wanted to get our hands on cleaning supplies and clean the bathroom, but Pat was wise and helped me not to get sent to Disney World jail for the night. Disney World jail is a real thing! We only ended up riding a few rides, but we served thousands of people. At that point in my life, I never had a better time at Disney.

As we continue in our stewardship series today, we join Jesus and the disciples in a very holy moment right before the Passover celebration. Jesus does something remarkable and completely unexpected. Let's turn to John 13: 1-17.

Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end. It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.

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

Jesus replied, You don't understand now what I am doing, but someday you will."

No," Peter protested, you will never ever wash my feet!"

Jesus replied, Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me."

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

Jesus replied, A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not all of you." For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, Not all of you are clean."

After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, Do you understand what I was doing? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, because that's what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.

John 13: 1-17 New Living Translation

The Word of God for the People of God. Thanks be to God!

We join Jesus and the disciples before the Passover celebration. Jesus knew his time on earth was short, and Jesus would soon return to the Father. During this holy moment, Jesus shares a few very significant teachings with the disciples.

LOVE TO THE UTTERMOST / eis telos – εἰς τέλος

In verse one, the apostle John writes that Jesus loved the disciples to the very end. The Greek words for "to the end" are *eis telos* (εἰς τέλος). It means to the uttermost, completely, to the limit, to the ultimate goal or perfection. In this context, *telos* carries a dual meaning for Jesus' love in both quantity and quality. Jesus loved his disciples to the very last breath of His life on the cross and to the fullest degree love possible. Jesus' love does not shrink or grow selfish even when hours away from the agony of the cross. Jesus loves us to the very end right now in this moment too.

THE EXAMPLE OF HUMILITY

Jesus has all divine authority from God the Father. Yet, Jesus laid aside His garments and performed the job of the lowest servant. Foot-washing in first-century Israel was a standard hospitality practice and a symbol of lowliness rooted in everyday life in the desert. Offering a guest water to wash their feet was a very basic expectation. Failing to offer water for your feet was a sign of disrespect. If a household had any servants, washing feet was the job of a servant. No head of the household would be expected to wash feet. Jesus showed that true greatness in God's kingdom is measured by humbly serving others and not seeking status. In God's kingdom, the last is first and the first is last.

CLEANSING AND RENEWAL

When Peter initially refused to let Jesus wash his feet, Jesus replied that partaking in the washing was required to have a part with Jesus. This moment emphasizes how we need spiritual cleansing and ongoing renewal in our walk with Jesus. There is an echo to baptism here. Jesus says a person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet. We believe that baptism serves as the initial sign of our faith in Christ and spiritual cleansing of our sins. Foot washing serves as an act of renewal. Throughout our life with Jesus, we need moments of ongoing renewal. Retreats, mission trips, special extended times of worship, and others renew and refresh our souls.

A CALL TO ACTION

In verses 12–17, Jesus tells the disciples since their Lord and Master has washed their feet, they also ought to wash one another's feet. Followers are called to imitate the selfless love of Jesus. The Almighty God, the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of all things is humble enough and love us so much to take on the role of a servant and wash the feet of his closest friends and followers. What a tremendous call to action for us to serve others!

ARE YOU JUDAS, PETER, OR JESUS?

Judas is the one who betrays Jesus. Judas is one of the disciple. We can only assume from the Scripture that Jesus washed Judas' feet along with the other disciples, but Jesus refers to Judas as not being cleaned. Judas knows much about Jesus, but his heart is very distant from Jesus' heart. Judas has been entrusted with the disciples' group money bag, but Judas has not been a good steward of those resources.

Remember just six days before the Passover celebration began, Jesus and disciples went to the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary in Bethany. They had a dinner to honor Jesus. Mary took a jar of expensive perfume and anointed Jesus' feet. Judas objects to Mary's extravagant offering.

But Judas Iscariot, the disciple who would soon betray him, said, That perfume was worth a year's wages. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor." Not that he cared for the poor—he was a thief, and since he was in charge of the disciples' money, he often stole some for himself. (John 12:4-6)

Some historians and theologians also suggest that Judas had unfilled political disappointment brewing as he followed Jesus. Judas could have betrayed Jesus out of a desire to force Jesus to spark an earthly revolution. The Jews lived under the occupation of the Roman Empire. However, Jesus was never interested in an overthrow of the government. Jesus is completely committed to ushering God's people into God's God.

Peter is the one who tells Jesus not to wash his feet. Peter was passionate and often fearless about following Jesus. Other times Peter is confused about what Jesus is trying to teach Peter and the disciples.

Sometimes Peter allows fear and doubt to control him. Remember when Peter walked on water toward Jesus, he took his eyes off Jesus, looked at the strong wind, became afraid, and began to sink. Pastor Mike reminded us a couple of Sundays ago how Peter fell asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane instead of praying as Jesus asked.

Peter sometimes spoke or acted without thinking about all the implications. Peter rebuked Jesus when Jesus predicted His own death, and he foolishly offered to build three shelters for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Peter is sometimes overconfident. Peter proudly claimed that he would never abandon Jesus even if everyone else abandoned Jesus. In just a few hours, Peter denied knowing Jesus three times out of fear of his own safety before a rooster crowed.

Jesus takes on the role of the servant. Jesus was humble and loves to the very utmost. In washing the disciples' feet, Jesus simply uses water and a towel, yet the extravagance is no less than Mary's expensive perfume. It is nothing short of scandalous that Jesus, who is the Almighty God in the flesh, should take on the menial task of servant. This act of love and service points to the even greater scandal to come in the dark hours ahead. Jesus will lay down his life and be crucified on a Roman cross — the form of execution reserved for rebels and slaves.

Jesus is calling us to selfless love in practical ways. We ought to be willing to wash each other's feet. Let's talk about what serving like Jesus might look like in the church, through missions, in our homes, and among our neighbors.

WHAT DOES SERVING JESUS LOOK LIKE FOR YOU?

In the church, there are so many ways to serve. You can be an usher or a greeter. Go up to Miriam Dady and tell her you want to be a usher or a greeter. Miriam will be overjoyed! We have opportunities to serve communion or share our gift of music in worship.

I believe there is a special place in heaven for people who disciple children and youth on Sundays. As a college student, I took a 5th grade Sunday School class for two years at my home church in Savannah. It was not the easiest ministry effort, but I won't trade it for anything!

You could lead a small group or start a discipleship band with other adults. When there is an opportunity to volunteer, say yes more often than you say no. I understand boundaries, and it's impossible to say yes to every opportunity. Yet, as faithful stewards of the church and followers of Jesus, we should say yes to serving in the church more often than we say no. Say no to the things of this world so you can say yes to Jesus as much as possible!

Through missions, there are so many opportunities to serve through our Food Bank, iServe, Disaster Relief with Faith Responders, Sleep in Heavenly Peace, or serving with one of our mission partners on a regular basis. Our church has been serving with Twelve Churches and now with On Eagles Wings in Leon, Nicaragua for many years. Do everything you can do to support our Nicaragua Mission Team! We would love for as many people as possible to serve with us in Nicaragua. However, we know that is not possible for some. If you cannot go, pray and support the people who are going.

I would love to go on every mission trip from Killearn, but there are times I am unable to go on mission trips. A couple of years ago, I started to support others from our church who are going to serve. If I know you are raising support for a mission trip and let me know about it, I promise to support you. It will not be your largest gift, but I will give you \$10 guaranteed and pray for you as you go and serve.

Jesus is also calling us to serve at home. Serving your family is so important. If you are serving in the church and through missions but not serving at home - we have a serious problem. If you are not sure how to help, ask someone at your house. Help with the laundry. One of the chores that I have taken up is washing towels for our family on Friday mornings before I do my own laundry. If you want to serve your family, here is an easy one. Wash the dishes. In all my years of ministry with college students living with roommates, more conflict is resolved if you wash the dishes whenever you see dishes that need washing. It doesn't matter who made the dirty dishes - wash the dishes and you will be a blessing to everyone at home.

Finally, Jesus is calling us to serve our neighbors. Meet your neighbors. Offer to help. Share a meal. Serving your neighbor is a great way to show your love and share Jesus with the people around you. What you do to serve your neighbors will be a more

powerful witness than any outreach effort of any church in town. Once you know, serve, and love your neighbors, it will be much easier to invite them to come to church with you.

Where do you find yourself among the disciples in John 13? Are you Judas? You are here and involved in the church, but your heart is not fully committed. You are holding back - not giving all you can. Are you betraying the call that Jesus has on your life? Are you Peter? You are passionate about Jesus and sharing in ministry with others. Maybe you need God to do more refining or grow you into a more mature disciple of Jesus. Are you the humble servant like Jesus? I pray you are ready, willing, and able to follow Jesus wherever the Holy Spirit leads. Surrendering everything. No holding back!

SUGGESTED RESOURCES: (Books marked with * are available to be checked-out in the Asbury Discipleship Resource Center)

- *Giving Challenge* (weekly videos), RightNow Media
- *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*, Timothy Keller
- *The Hole in Our Holiness*, Kevin DeYoung
- *True Community: The Biblical Practice of Koinonia*, Jerry Bridges
- *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- *On being a Servant of God*, Warren W. Wiersbe
- *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, Timothy Keller

Icebreaker Questions

1. What is an everyday chore you would gladly hand off to someone else—and what is one you actually enjoy?
2. When has someone's small, unexpected act of kindness made a big difference in your day?

Sermon Discussion Questions

1. John 13:1 describes Jesus loving His disciples "to the very end." How does His willingness to serve while facing the cross deepen your understanding of His love? How might that love shape your response when serving feels inconvenient?
2. Jesus knew His divine authority yet took the place of a servant. What does this teach us about greatness in God's kingdom? What might "picking up the towel" look like in your everyday life?
3. Why do you think Peter initially resisted having his feet washed? When do pride, discomfort, or a desire for control make it difficult for you to receive Jesus' care—or accept help from others?
4. The sermon contrasts Judas' divided heart, Peter's sincere but imperfect faith, and Jesus' selfless love. Where do you recognize divided loyalties or a need for spiritual growth in yourself? How can your group encourage one another toward wholehearted discipleship?
5. Jesus connects blessing with doing what He teaches in John 13:17. Considering your church, missions, home, and neighbors, where is God inviting you to serve? Name one specific action you will take this week and how you will make room for it.
6. What impacted you most from the sermon?
7. How might this group pray for you this week?