

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(April 17, 2011)

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

PALM SUNDAY

Jesus, the Servant/King

(John 12:12-26; 13:1-20)

Introduction: The spice of life -

- One person believes that money was made flat so that it can stack; another thinks that it's made round so that it will spend easier.
- One person wants to see the Spurs go all the way to the NBA Finals; well, pity the poor souls in San Antonio - and I know some - who don't like basketball. (When they say, "Go, Spurs, Go!" they mean something else entirely...)
- One thinks that a fabulous night at the movies would look like a marathon of Jane Austin flicks; her husband would enjoy a few good Bruce Willis/Mark Wahlberg/Sylvester Stallones.

You name it - male/female, extrovert/introvert, free spirit/ nerd, academic/athlete - variety is a fact of life and frequently a wonderful thing. The contrasts between people supply much of the spice of life.

Today we will watch as a striking, contrasting set of images emerge in the Gospel of John, giving us more compelling reasons to be drawn to Jesus.

We saw contrasts in spades last Sunday, contrasts that revealed some very differing ways anyone might respond to Jesus.

The "snapshots" we saw last Sunday

In one scene we watched Mary anoint Jesus' feet with her perfume-soaked hair as Judas stood in the corner, scowling and calling her actions a monumental waste.

In another scene we saw eager crowds gather outside a home in Bethany, hoping to get a faith-confirming glimpse of Lazarus, the man Jesus raised from the dead. In the same crowd, standing off to the side, was a group of Chief Priests who were plotting to do away with Lazarus so as to bury evidence of the power of Jesus.

Today, we are going to spend the bulk of our time looking at two more greatly contrasting scenes. And the events we will see this morning take place in the days and in the hours leading up to His death.

The time stamp for today's first "snapshot"

John gives us a time stamp, when he says, **[12:12] On the next day...**

So, what happens here is on the day after the gathering of the crowd at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

It is now five days before Passover (see 12:1), or Sunday. We know this day as Palm Sunday.

Jesus is heading into Jerusalem and receives quite a welcome from the crowds who are traveling in the same direction on the same road.

WELCOMES for King Jesus (12:12-26)

A Welcoming "Hosanna!" (vv. 12-18)

The multitudes rejoice (vv. 12-13)

[12] On the next day the large crowd who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, [13] took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet Him, and began to shout, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel."

Every Passover season, thousands and thousands of Jewish pilgrims streamed into Jerusalem to worship. This particular road - the road from Bethany to Jerusalem - was the 1604 of ancient Israel, always congested at Passover.

This year, stories about Jesus have spread through the traveling crowd. People who know are telling about His teaching. Some have seen His miracles, and they are telling those stories.

All of a sudden, somebody spotted Jesus! All attention goes to Him. The crowd identifies Him as THE ONE. He is the Messiah who will restore Israel to God. He is the King who will bring deliverance from Roman oppression.

The people wave palm branches symbolizing King Jesus' coming victory. Their cry, "*Hosanna!*" means, "*Save us, NOW!*"

Even the steed Jesus rode into the city fueled their hopes for imminent victory and freedom.

Jesus rode a donkey (vv. 14-15)

[14] Jesus, finding a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written, [15] "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your King is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."

Had Jesus come into town riding on a big, strong horse, people would have known that there was a fight coming. Riding on a donkey was the king's way to say, "*Relax. I've got everything under control.*"

On this day, what we call "Palm Sunday," the crowds were completely with Jesus. On this day He enjoyed the greatest popularity of His life.

As John goes on to tell us, it was the raising of Lazarus from the dead that was the trump card that finally convinced so many in the crowd that Jesus was who He had claimed to be all along.

Proof of Jesus' Kingship! (vv. 17-18)

[17] So the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead, continued to testify about Him. [18] For this reason also the people went and met Him, because they heard that He had performed this sign.

This, at last, after the challenges of the last three years, is a really good day. Everybody is for Jesus. OK. Almost everybody.

If it appears that everything is finally going to be OK because, well, now, the crowds are on His side at the moment, we haven't spent enough time watching the political fortunes of leaders in our own country.

It's tough on top. Ask Barak Obama. Ask George W. Bush. President Bush could hardly have been more popular after the attack of 9/11. Barak Obama began his presidency with a landslide victory and approval ratings through the roof.

But the tides can turn. A leader who is popular one day may well be pilloried the next.¹

And in this Palm Sunday crowd, Jesus' following is not quite monolithic. Already a crack begins to appear, and the crack is created by a group of Pharisees.

Completely "Dissed" (v. 19)

[19] So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are not doing any good; look, the world has gone after Him."

The Pharisees had been trying for a long time to convince people to NOT follow Jesus.

Oh, they knew about the miracles. They knew Jesus' claims to be God's Messiah. They knew His teachings and they knew of His character.

But the *more* the people followed Jesus, the *fewer* people followed them - and they didn't like that.

¹ Calvin Miller wrote the following about these crowds who sang praises to Jesus on Palm Sunday. "*Humanity is fickle. They may dress for a morning coronation and never feel the need to change clothes to attend an execution in the afternoon. So Palm Sundays and Good Fridays always fit comfortably into the same spring week.*" (Calvin Miller, from The Singer)

We should envision them sulking, playing the blame game, pointing fingers at one another over the lack of success their anti-Jesus efforts have produced.

So, Jesus was enthusiastically welcomed to Jerusalem by great throngs of people who received Him for the king he was. He was “dissed” by a group of leaders who felt threatened by Him. And John tells us about one more significant Jerusalem welcome.

The Time is “Now” (vv. 20-23)

[20] Now there were some Greeks among those who were going up to worship at the feast; [21] these then came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and began to ask him, saying, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” [22] Philip came and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip came and told Jesus. [23] And Jesus answered them, saying, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

The Lord’s immediate response to the news that Philip and Andrew bring Him about some Greeks who want to see Him is startling. *“It’s time, guys.”*

Now, from the perspective of 2011, we understand His thought. Jesus is clearly saying, *“Now that My mission has attracted attention from the Gentile world, there will no longer be any delay. The die is cast. The wheels are in motion. Bring on the cross.”*

But I very seriously doubt that this is what Philip and Andrew were thinking.

Despite the fact that Jesus went on to talk about a grain of wheat needing to die before it produced fruit, I’m betting that the sound of the *“Hosannas”* and the images of the palm branches and the praise of the crowds was foremost on their minds.

They would have thought, *“Bring on the crown!”*

Stop and think a minute...

Jews of Jesus’ day looked back at the days when David and Solomon reigned as kings as the nations’ glory days. And on Palm Sunday hope revived that those glory days were about to return.

In a monarchy (or in a nation with that history, like Israel), people know that their fortunes rise or fall with the king. Well, King Jesus is here! - and the people pinned all their hopes on Him.

Frankly, it is difficult for us, living under the system of government we do, to relate. We have checks and balances to keep any one person or branch from wielding too much power. Not so in a monarchy. All power is concentrated in one man. And as far as the Palm Sunday crowds were concerned, Jesus is the Man!

He is welcomed by the crowds as the One who will bring God’s salvation and deliverance from the Romans.

And you’ll notice that Jesus didn’t reject the praise of the crowds. He ate it up. He welcomed it and the reason He welcomed it is because He knew that the crowds’ worship and praise was perfectly well-placed.

He was worthy. He was a king, and a king more glorious than anyone in that crowd would have dreamed.

Today, you and I recognize King Jesus, too. If we had palm branches, we’d wave them. If He was passing by on a donkey, we’d lay our robes in the dirt for Him.

But, given that we have no palm branches and He is not passing by, of what will our worship and praise consist?

Today, let’s join in giving Jesus the gift of our trust, our obedience, and our submission. He is the king, and He is worthy!

Well, John has given us some exciting action in this 12th chapter of his book. We see King Jesus, opposed by some, sought out by others, and praised by most.

The next action John describes occurs four days later in an Upper Room in Jerusalem.

Skipping ahead four days...

John, alone of all the four Gospel writers, effectively skips over all the middle events of Holy Week.

We know from Matthew, Mark, and Luke about the cleansing of the Temple and the cursing of the fruitless fig tree. From them we know about the debates with the religious leaders, Jesus' stern rebukes of hypocrites and His predictions of things to come. It is from the other Gospels that we hear about the widow's generous gift, listen as Jesus tells a few new parables, and learn about all the preparations for the Passover feast.

But today we are looking at John - not Matthew, not Mark, not Luke. And John overlooks all of these events and jumps ahead four days to Jesus' last night with His disciples.²

Closely linked in John's mind and in His Gospel are Jesus' last public experience - the Triumphal Entry of Palm Sunday - and the opening act of His last private meal with His disciples.

So, John takes us in a nearly straight line from the Triumphal Entry on Palm Sunday to a Thursday evening gathering in an Upper Room in Jerusalem.³

² Each one of the Gospels brings a unique perspective on the life of Jesus. Each one tells different stories and each one tells some of the same stories somewhat differently. But God was inspiring the writers to put down exactly what He wanted them to say, using their own personal styles. John's Gospel is different-er than the other three "synoptic" Gospels. There are differences, but not contradictions; variation but not true conflict. And the complex contrasts in the Gospels are true to life and add depth and texture to our understanding of the life of Jesus.

³ Chapters 13-17 of John's Gospel comprise what is generally referred to as the Upper Room Discourse. Here, we have the account of the last meeting Jesus ever had with His followers before His crucifixion. In fact, most all of the material we read in these chapters is **only** recorded in John.

SERVICE by King Jesus (13:1-20)

"Setting the Table" (vv. 1-3)

The time and place of the Last Supper

Due to a discrepancy between Galilean and Judean calendars, and not to a fault on either group's part, Galileans - like Jesus and His disciples - observed Passover on the 14th of Nisan while the Judean Jews observed it on the 15th.

Thus, Jesus and His disciples ate this Passover meal on Thursday, while the residents of Jerusalem and Judea waited to observe it the next day, Friday.⁴

We are not surprised to read that Jesus knew exactly what was about to happen to Him.

Aware of coming events (v. 1)

[1]...Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father...[3]...knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God...

His whole life had been aimed at the event that was now about twelve hours away. Now it's time. He's about to return to the Father He had left in glory when He came to fulfill His mission on earth.

And despite knowing what was to come - the brutality of the trials and the scourging and the mocking and the painful death - it was the welfare of His disciples that was foremost in His mind.

⁴ From Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ by Harold Hoehner. The following day, all Israel observed Passover and sacrificed the lamb in the middle of the afternoon, precisely the time at which Jesus, the Lamb of God, died.

Jesus loved His disciples (v. 1)

[1]... having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

It is certainly true that Jesus loved them right up to the end, as long as He was alive. But that doesn't begin to capture what John is saying here.

The real point of the words ***"to the end"*** is the *degree* to which He loved those twelve disciples. Nobody loved those men the way Jesus did. His love for His followers was the purest, the most sacrificial love imaginable.

And the same is true, today. Jesus' love for His followers is perfect.

He will never pull the rug out from under us and remove that love. His love - in a world of tsunamis and earthquakes and wars and national debt and cancer and divorce and heartache - is the lone rock upon which we can build lives that have meaning and purpose.

John's focus is squarely on Jesus. But he mentions another character in this scene. We saw Judas Iscariot last Sunday, too.

Judas' course is set (v. 2)

[2] During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him⁵

Movies and books may from time to time paint a picture of Judas as a misguided political radical who was really just trying to push Jesus forward by his actions.

I don't believe Scripture allows that thinking. The Bible's slant is that Judas ruthlessly betrayed Jesus by handing Him over to the ruling Jews, fully knowing what the results would be for Jesus. He knew exactly what he was doing.

⁵ A possible, though not likely, translation of verse 2 is, ***"The devil had already made up his mind that Judas the son of Simon should betray Him."***

All we need to do is recall the event of Mary's anointing from the previous chapter to understand what motivated Judas. The devil planted a diabolical idea into a very receptive heart.

Yes, John makes that comment about Judas. But aside from that quick remark, the main focus is the outrageous action taken by King Jesus. He washed His disciples' feet.

A Servant is Needed (vv. 3-5)

Dirty feet...

In San Antonio, in 2011, we don't consider foot-washing a necessary courtesy provided by every host to his or her guests. But then, in 2011 San Antonio, our streets are paved, and we have designated garbage dumps. (Although you might want to be careful walking around downtown in sandals on Fiesta week...)

In the ancient world, foot-washing was a common service offered by a host to anyone who came to his home.

A servant (and this would be the servant who drew the short straw for the day's chores) was given the onerous assignment of washing the feet of guests. The task was so disgusting that guests would not be asked to do the chore for themselves.

Foot-washing was necessary because of the condition of the city streets of the ancient near east.

All of us can imagine what feet would look like (and smell like!) after a long day of trudging through muddy streets with sandals on.

Along with the mud, garbage was often dumped straight into the streets where dogs roamed. Of course the dogs would eat the garbage - and then leave behind an even bigger mess.

So, mud, grime, and more were caked on to the sandals and feet of the thirteen men who came together to eat the Passover Meal in Jerusalem.

As they entered this home, the Twelve had probably expected the common courtesy of having their feet washed.

But, not being greeted by a servant at the door, and not wanting to stoop to wash their own feet, they all proceeded to the Upper Room to eat the Passover - with dirty feet.

A few minutes after everyone had made themselves comfortable, and with the Passover meal in progress, Jesus moved to remedy the situation.

He untied the sandal thongs⁶ of His disciples and started washing their grimy, filthy, smelly, sweaty feet.⁷

Watch Jesus, the Servant/King...

[3] Jesus...[4] got up from supper, and laid aside His garments, and taking a towel, He girded Himself. [5] Then He poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

Jesus washed the disciples' feet because their feet needing washing. But by washing their feet He was able to drive home a couple of unforgettable truths.

We'll jump to the end to see the second truth first, and then come back to look at the foot-washing's first lesson a bit more closely.

After everyone's feet were washed, Jesus reclined with the disciples again. He told them that what He had just done is what they were to do - one way or another - for each other.

Foot-Washing's Two Lessons (vv. 12-17; vv. 6-11)

Serving (vv. 12-17)

[12] So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?" [13] You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. [14] If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.⁸ [15] For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. [16] Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. [17] If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

There was never any question about who was the Leader of the group. King Jesus was the Leader.

And King Jesus wanted His followers to both BE servants and to be KNOWN as servants. At that Passover He modeled servanthood.

He took off the festive garments always worn at Passover, clothed Himself as a common servant, filled a basin with water, and performed the menial service of washing His disciples' feet.

And the message that comes to us from this action is so patently apparent that it hardly needs saying. But since Jesus said it, I'll go ahead and say it, too.

Servanthood is not advanced discipleship. Servanthood is essential discipleship. We who would follow Jesus are to look for ways to serve, struggle to get to the end of the line, fight for the privilege of performing menial duties and start arguments about who gets to serve!

If we aspire to grow as disciples of Jesus, we will learn to serve. King Jesus served, and we, His subjects, are called to serve as well.

⁶ Remember John 1:27, where John the Baptist declared that he was unworthy to loosen Jesus' sandal strap.

⁷ See Philippians 2:12. There, the apostle Paul describes Jesus' incarnation, which is what Jesus pictures by His act in the Upper Room.

⁸ No New Testament text requires foot-washing of believers, not even 1 Timothy 5:10.

That's a clear teaching from Jesus, built on His act of washing His disciples' feet. Now, let's retreat to the foot-washing scene again and follow John's telling of the story.

As important as is the call to serve, there is something else here for us today.

Cleansing (vv. 6-11)

Imagine that you were one of the disciples at that Passover meal. How would you feel if Jesus came to you, dressed as a servant, and carrying a basin to wash your feet?

Most of us would recoil from anyone washing our feet - and we'd be especially opposed to it if it was Jesus with the basin and towel. We'd be embarrassed and super self-conscious. And we just might do what Simon Peter did.

Jesus was making the rounds, going from disciple to disciple. We don't know how long this had been going on or how many sets of feet He had washed before He came to Peter. Peter was confused.

Peter's confusion (v. 6)

[6] So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?"

What is going on in Simon Peter's mind is what we would call today, "cognitive dissonance."

Cognitive dissonance is that uncomfortable feeling we get when we try to hold two conflicting ideas at the same time.

You think of yourself as a smart, careful shopper and purchase a car on impulse that you later regret. You wonder if you are really such a smart, careful shopper because a smart shopper probably wouldn't have made that purchase. Cognitive dissonance.

You agree to go to work for the church and to mow the church yard. The Deacons promise you pay. At the end of the day of mowing, one of the Deacons approaches you and thanks you profusely for your work, "*It looks great!*" - and hands you a check for \$1.50. Cognitive dissonance.

Peter was experiencing a major case of cognitive dissonance as Jesus bent down in front of him to wash his feet, because just four days earlier he had walked alongside Jesus on the road from Bethany to Jerusalem.

Peter had watched Jesus ride a donkey into Jerusalem. He had listened as people cried out, "***Hosanna! Save us, Lord!***"

Peter saw Jesus receiving the acclaim that comes only to a King. And Peter knew that it was an impossible distance from people falling at Jesus' feet to Jesus stooping to wash his feet.

Peter knew that if HE was the King, HE sure wouldn't be washing feet. Foot-washing was to be done by the lowliest servant. Here it is being done by King Jesus - and that just didn't fit. It seemed all wrong!

Jesus understood Peter's confusion and reassured him.

Jesus understands (v. 7)

[7] Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter."

That answer might well have satisfied some people. It didn't satisfy Peter. He wasn't about to sit still while His King performed such a degrading act.

Peter's resolve (v. 8a)

[8a] Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!"

Peter speaks about as emphatically as it was possible to speak. He literally said, "*You shall not ever wash my feet forever!*"

And you know - I understand where Peter's coming from. I don't think I'd like Jesus washing my feet, either.

And if I didn't say it out loud, I would have been thinking the same thing. *"Don't wash my feet, Lord. That's not Your place!"* I'll bet that's what all the disciples were thinking.

But there was purpose to King Jesus' action here. It was necessary that He wash Peter's feet. A relationship with God is predicated on being washed by King Jesus.

Cleansing (vv. 8b-11)

[8b] Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."

There's something about this washing ritual that is foundational - or that pictures something foundational - to a relationship with Jesus. If there is no washing, there is no relationship.

Swinging wildly from extreme to extreme, Peter the Pendulum responds.

[9] Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head."

Nice try, Peter (and don't you feel sorry for him? I do. Every comment he makes gets corrected.). But Jesus knows what He is doing here.

[10] Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you."

[11] For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean."

Jesus was using the language of bathing and foot-washing to teach a vital lesson about cleansing from sin.

To have "bathed" is to be washed clean of personal sin. It is to be forgiven. And this forgiveness occurs whenever anyone places their trust in Jesus Christ for salvation.⁹

If you have recognized your need for cleansing from sin and have placed your trust in Jesus - the One who died and rose again - to provide that cleansing, you are CLEAN! You are forgiven. You are heaven-bound and nothing will ever change that.

But, just as regular cleaning is necessary in the physical world (and it certainly is!), so also, spiritually speaking, we all need to be cleaned up repeatedly.

When I lose my footing, slip and fall into sin, I need to be cleaned up. When I dirty myself, I need to have my feet washed. And how do I go about getting clean after dirtying myself?

I CONFESS my sins to the Lord. Regular, honest, specific confession of sin is a necessary part of every believer's walk with God.

Not general whitewashing, *"Lord, I know I've been bad this week"* but a pointed admission of particular wrong-doing:

"I spoke to my wife (or husband) in a mean way"

"I cheated on a test today"

"I surfed to a pornographic web site yesterday"

"I drank alcohol to the point where I wasn't in control of myself last week."

You get the picture. Specifics count in confession.

And what does King Jesus do when we confess?

He rises from His throne in glory, wraps Himself with a servant's towel and washes the filth off our feet so that we are clean again and can walk with Him in the light.

⁹ Notice that the Lord was saying that not all of the twelve disciples had taken a bath. Specifically, Judas wasn't clean. He wasn't saved.

This week, you and I are going to get dirty. Count on it. But Jesus has provided a way to get clean. Bring your sin to Jesus. Let the King wash your feet and know the cleansing power of Jesus when you fall.

Conclusion:

This morning, we affirm that we are called to serve. Jesus, our Master serves; we gladly follow in His steps.

But even more than that, this morning we worship, in awe of a Savior who is the King of Kings and the Lord of lords who SERVES.

Will you worship this Servant/King, the One who served you when He died on the cross for your once-and-for-all forgiveness, and the One who washes your feet when you sin?