

Pathways 4-serve; baptize Archer Dean Rhodes 8:45; D Thompson mission minute  
February 15, 2015  
Boone United Methodist Church; Jason Byassee

Jaylynn and I were part of a wedding party once on Cape Cod. It was late afternoon when the light is magic, flooding into the doors of the little old stone church, and this couple walked in shining like the sun. Jaylynn leaned over to me and asked, "Who's that?" And I said "I don't know but they look like movie stars." Guess what? They *were* movie stars. Or at least actors—live in Hollywood, he was in *Remember the Titans*, she was in *ER*, sort of like our own Piper Collins, my associate Vern Collins' wife (ask Piper sometime about what it was like to kiss Mel Gibson. A hint—Mel smokes a lot). These two were the most beautiful couple I'd ever seen in person. But in Hollywood they're not famous. Joan Crawford, who very much was famous, used to dress to the nines anytime she left the house. Took her hours. Her reason? "If you want to see the girl next door, go next door."<sup>1</sup> She had a part to play—Hollywood stars are glamorous people and in America we love celebrity and superficial beauty.

Now imagine if they came into the church, stripped off those expensive clothes, and started cleaning the toilets?

<sup>1</sup>That's the equivalent of what happens in the story of Jesus washing his disciples feet that I'm about to read to you. The disciples are convinced Jesus is Lord, messiah of Israel. He's said confusing things they don't understand yet about being God in flesh and dying for the sins of the whole world. In that culture the host of a party arranged for a slave to wash the guests' feet. This was just a social convention for lowly people. I remember a cable show about ancient *Rome* where masters would absent mindedly slap slaves for getting something wrong. No one in the show flinched—they would smack a slave the way we would a bug. At this party Jesus, the host of the universe who made all, takes off his clothes and puts on a towel and kneels and starts to do a slave's job. What would be the equivalent for us? Maybe being in a luxury box at a Panthers game and leaving to go wash the stadium toilets. Leaving a table at a restaurant to go wash your own dishes and others. Leaving first class of an airplane to try to load bags on the tarmac. Leaving a mansion behind guard towers to sleep in the car. Some of those things wouldn't be legal, let alone likely. How much less likely for the God more beautiful than a million sons who launched creation with a flick of the wrist to tenderly wash our feet? How much more unlikely for him to have nails driven through those wrists? Hear this word from the book you love.

John 13:1-17

*Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2 The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things and was going to God, 4 got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8 Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." 9 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 10 Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." 11 For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."*

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<sup>1</sup> [http://civa.org/sitecontent/wp-content/uploads/exhibits/seeingthesavior/content/images/large/Viera\\_Hloni\\_kova\\_Foot\\_Washing.jpg](http://civa.org/sitecontent/wp-content/uploads/exhibits/seeingthesavior/content/images/large/Viera_Hloni_kova_Foot_Washing.jpg)

*After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, 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 that is what I am. 14 So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. 15 For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. 16 Very truly I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. 17 If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.*

This sermon is the fourth in a series of five on our new graphic identity as a church.<sup>2</sup> You’ve seen our logo that tells our congregation’s story, ours is the path of the cross through these mountains. This does not replace our denomination’s logo we love it too, this just speaks of what we think it means to be Christian in Boone.<sup>3</sup> Our new icons describe the steps of being a Christian here, we worship, we connect, we serve, and we grow. I know these new graphics will take some getting use to. We’ll tweak things—you’ll see a brief order of service back in your bulletin for the next series in two weeks.

<sup>4</sup>Today’s sermon is on service, so naturally we focus on Jesus’ most visually stunning act of service, when the master took the role of a slave. It’s hard for us to feel the force of this. CEO’s who bank bonuses in the eight figures speak of themselves as servant leaders and we don’t even laugh out loud.<sup>5</sup> We expect presidents to serve turkeys at Thanksgiving with an apron on, generals to get their boots muddy with enlisted men. Here’s the best shot I got at getting at the discomfort of the disciples. In the middle ages kings of England would wash beggars’ feet on Maundy Thursday, the day where the church commemorates Jesus’ act of service. A few hundred years ago they started giving money instead. Ah, no, but here’s a check. Popes of Rome have kept on washing feet.<sup>6</sup> Here’s Pope Benedict using very kingly utensils to wash without touching. The current pope went to a jail and washed Muslims’ feet, including a Muslim woman.<sup>7</sup> And he didn’t stop at washing. Look closer, because I think this should be awkward,<sup>8</sup> here he is kissing a Muslim woman’s foot. Conservative Muslims reacted—that’s a woman’s foot! Conservative Catholics and professional Muslim haters reacted too—how dare he! One site said he has no idea he’s acting like a slave to Muslims. But actually, he does. Because Jesus does. Jesus bends and washes all our feet. Enemies included. Kisses them. I’m with the Baptist minister who said of Francis,<sup>9</sup> “Now there’s a pope who really knows how to pope!”

Three points today as we talk about service. One the grossout factor. Two what sort of God we serve. Three what sort of people we’re to be.<sup>10</sup> One, the grossout factor. Pastor Jeff McClain on my staff has told this story so often the rest of the staff finishes it for him now. He was in church once for Maundy Thursday and the presider led a footwashing. Nice. Then she moved behind the table to preside over communion. Without washing her hands first. Not ok. I think his story gets at our discomfort with footwashing. It’s weird. It’s not a thing we do. In Jesus’ day it was as common as a handshake. In ours its an odd religious ritual that we’re not

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<sup>2</sup> Logo up plz

<sup>3</sup> Icons up one by one plz

<sup>4</sup> Service icon up and stays up

<sup>5</sup>

[http://assets.nydailynews.com/polopoly\\_fs/1.22033.1345132174!/img/httpImage/image.jpg\\_gen/derivatives/gallery\\_1200/president-george-w-bush.jpg](http://assets.nydailynews.com/polopoly_fs/1.22033.1345132174!/img/httpImage/image.jpg_gen/derivatives/gallery_1200/president-george-w-bush.jpg)

<sup>6</sup> [http://cdn2-b.examiner.com/sites/default/files/styles/image\\_content\\_width/hash/ec/f1/foot%20washing\\_0.jpg?itok=utiQlx7M](http://cdn2-b.examiner.com/sites/default/files/styles/image_content_width/hash/ec/f1/foot%20washing_0.jpg?itok=utiQlx7M)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.barenakedislam.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/hi-pope-kissing-feet.jpg>

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.aliefpost.com/wp-content/plugins/RSSPoster\\_PRO/cache/8efab\\_130328183141-pope-kissing-foot-horizontal-gallery.jpg](http://www.aliefpost.com/wp-content/plugins/RSSPoster_PRO/cache/8efab_130328183141-pope-kissing-foot-horizontal-gallery.jpg)

<sup>9</sup> Quote up (no attribution)

<sup>10</sup> I. Eeewww!

sure we like. I had a footwashing service last year and shouldn't have been surprised when we had more choir members present than foot washing recipients. I mean, feet are intimate, weird things. Do we really want them exposed in church? Handled by someone else? Reminds me of arguments in churches when we first started passing the peace decades ago. Some hated it. War broke out over peace. We humans can be awfully silly creatures.

Maybe we should think bigger than our own feet. Some churches suggest washing hands. Also intimate, maybe just as dirty, but slightly less weird. Not sure that does the trick. I'm struck when I've been privileged to wash folks feet how moving it is. I had a Hardees biscuit maker come up to have her feet washed, a great grandmother up at 4 every day, and her feet were, well, let me quote her great-granddaughter, "nasty!" And they were beautiful to wash, servant's feet. I got to wash Jack Byassee's feet when he was an infant and didn't think it was any different than bathtime. Some churches have made footwashing part of a way of serving their neighboring homeless—<sup>11</sup>some churches offer a foot clinic to that cities thousands of homeless. Podiatrists, orthotists, pedicurists, shoe salesmen the works. To be homeless means there's no way to get off your feet. For one instant the church does like Jesus and treats those feet tenderly.

Some churches regard footwashing as a sacrament. That is, a physical way God saves. The Mennonites are not big on baptism or communion but they love them some footwashing. Why? Because the Gospel of John has no baptism and no Last Supper of Jesus. All it has is a footwashing. And Jesus commands us to do it for one another!<sup>12</sup> Jesus says, "If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." Of course there are other ways of washing feet than washing feet. Bathing an elderly parent or friend who can't take care of themselves. Cooking for someone. Cleaning after them. I confess I didn't grow up knowing how to grab a sponge or a broom and to jump in and serve. Many of you were and do. We have no church without you. The rest of us need to learn how to join in. Let me give you an example from our church. Our annual bazaar nets some \$60,000 a year. You all sweat together for a week, some of you for months, and friendships blossom that wouldn't exist otherwise. Last year you upped what you give of that to local missions from a 10% tithe to 25%. And your chair for the last decade, Rosy Bentley, tells me she wants to see it be 100%. Somebody get that in the minutes! Folks in my generation and younger don't care about paying off the mortgage. We care about missions. Or we say we do. Bless you Rosy for helping us all wash feet. And keep the lights on and heat on and food on the table and alcoholism at bay for our needy neighbors.

Point two,<sup>13</sup> what sort of God we have. Those of you wiggled out by the idea of footwashing in church take heart. The story is only secondarily about footwashing. What it's really about is who God is. It starts out this way,<sup>14</sup> "Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." Jesus' hour is his betrayal, his crucifixion, and also his glorification, his resurrection. This is the beginning of the end. "He loved them to the end," John tells us, or maybe better, he loved them with all the love there is. This gesture is one of lavish self-outpouring. Which is who God is. Most people think of God as the biggest baddest toughest guy around. Like the playground bully only nice. Some of our songs sound that way: "Our God is greater, our God is stronger, our God is higher than any other." A buddy leaned over to me once and said "Our God can beat up your God." This story from John says something a little different.<sup>15</sup> "4 [Jesus] got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him." Don't look for the bully. Look for the one who's taken his clothes off,

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<sup>11</sup> <http://media.syracuse.com/news/photo/2010/11/9056025-large.jpg>

<sup>12</sup> Jn 17:14 up plz

<sup>13</sup> II. A God who washes feet

<sup>14</sup> Jn 17:1 up plz

<sup>15</sup> 17:4-5 up plz

who is washing your feet. St. Augustine my friend from the ancient church images us trying to stand on tiptoe to get a glimpse of God. Imagine a being with not just no end—we'll all have no end, our souls will live forever. But also with no beginning. Imagine someone who knows all but gives all freedom to love him or not. Imagine someone who is all-powerful who makes the laws of nature to show his glory. Imagine, imagine, imagine, and as we stretch our minds imagining we trip over the crucified slave at our feet.<sup>16</sup> God is not on a throne far away. God is kissing our feet, he's become our slave.

A friend of mine traveled to Paris to study with the greatest scholar in her field, a distinguished older man and a monk. Her husband was home without her when the door bell rang and it was the plumber. He did his best to direct the man under the sink to where the problem was. When my friend came back to see her husband and this man on hands and knees in the kitchen she about lost her mind. It was actually the scholar she admired. He was so unassuming her husband figured he was the plumber. And he actually got down on hands and knees to see if he could be helpful! I love those sorts of mixups. Here's the thing. Jesus is mixing up our notion of God. God's not the baddest dude around. God *is* self-denying service. And that's why we serve. I'm so grateful to see y'all who serve your neighbors through Circles, Zoe, Oasis, hospitality house, an alphabet soup of blessed organizations that serve. But you don't need my thanks. You do it because you love it. You get the blessing. It's selfish to serve. Mother Teresa pulled dying homeless out of the gutters in Calcutta because they are Jesus. She loved him through them. And that's the reason any of us really serve. For more of Jesus. In John's gospel the day of the crucifixion is different from the others. The others have Jesus crucified on Passover. John has him crucified the day before—the day when the lambs were slaughtered. The point is clear<sup>17</sup>—Jesus is the slain lamb. Sure he's a roaring lion. We all get that. He's also a slain lamb.

<sup>18</sup>Point three, what sort of people we're to be. Peter is ridiculous as ever in this passage. Judas the betrayer is there. What a bunch of losers Jesus chooses to be his people. Good news for us—he doesn't only take the beautiful people. I've taken to saying during communion that Jesus gave the cup to his friends—"even the one who would betray him." One of you thanked me for adding that. You said "if I'd heard that decades ago I could have forgiven my ex a lot sooner." Most of the disciples are neither colossal failures, they're just sort of there, inconsequential, saying nothing, like most of us most of the time. Peter says to the servant-king,<sup>19</sup> "You will never wash my feet." Jesus responds, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Jesus' people are those he washes, he serves, he restores, to be served by Jesus is to be saved. Peter overreacts again.<sup>20</sup> "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" This dude does nothing by halves. Peter's surprise is understandable. One writer tells a story of being at a conference and getting a few minutes with the speaker he'd just heard. Before he knew what was happening that great man had bent over and was tying his shoe! He didn't cue him, didn't ignore it, he just stooped to fix it. Guy couldn't do anything, just had to let him. How much more Peter's shock?<sup>21</sup> I love these images, this one from the church in Africa—do you see Peter's shock?<sup>22</sup> This one the twelve all lean in stupefied. What sort of God is this? What sort of people are we to be then?!

I've known some examples of folks who've served Jesus by stooping low, giving up power, serving instead of ruling. Henri Nouwen was a professor at Harvard. Some of y'all have read his work in caregivers class lately. He left that to join L'Arche, a home for developmentally disabled adults. Can you imagine giving

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<sup>16</sup> <https://deacongates.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/foot-washing1.jpg>

<sup>17</sup> <http://gallery.mlc->

[wels.edu/home/main.php?g2\\_view=core.DownloadItem&g2\\_itemId=47948&g2\\_serialNumber=2](wels.edu/home/main.php?g2_view=core.DownloadItem&g2_itemId=47948&g2_serialNumber=2)

<sup>18</sup> III. Who we're called to be

<sup>19</sup> 17:8

<sup>20</sup> 17:9 up

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/images/footwashing\\_02.jpg](http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/images/footwashing_02.jpg)

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.stgertrudes.org/Images/foot\\_washing.gif](http://www.stgertrudes.org/Images/foot_washing.gif)

up tenure at the world's most famous university to bathe and feed people who can't talk or move? Jesus could. Nouwen did. Leighton Ford who'll preach for us in April for our mission celebration used to fill in for his brother-in-law Billy Graham. He gave up preaching to thousands in stadiums to mentor young leaders—quiet work out of the headlines that matters more arguably. Jesus imagined it and Leighton's done it. The church has often lived this out dramatically. In 2004 a World Conference on Evangelization saw historic enemies wash feet on stage. Hutus and Tutsis washed each other's feet—those who were slaughterers and those who slaughtered show forgiveness is stronger than swords. Israelis and Palestinians. Did the same. Hope for the world to have peace, forgiveness, grace. In 2006 a government official from South Africa got in hot water in public for washing the feet of a former anti-apartheid activist. Washing feet isn't just a little religious ritual. It's a sign that God is knitting humanity back together. And after the murderous events in Chapel Hill this week that's good news indeed. That as strong as our human hate is God's weakness is stronger still.<sup>23</sup> In the words of the anthem you'll hear in a moment, Jesus is the "impoverished power that sets the soul free."

I know sometimes when you love an organization and want volunteers for it it feels like begging. Pleading. Manipulating and coercing. Trust me I know. Rosie when you invite to Bazaar, Laura Beach our new mission coordinator you'll feel this, all our lay leadership and all you leaders in town, we all face the 80/20 rule, that 20% of the people do 80% of the work. Here's the thing. God himself is self-giving service poured out to death for others. Inviting others to do likewise is just inviting them to be like God. Which is what the church exists for. It's what God exists for. Real life is doing the same. Grab a sponge. A towel. Let's get to work. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> From Stanley Fish *How to Write a Sentence and How to Read One*.

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<sup>23</sup> Michael Card quote up plz