

Maundy Thursday John 13:1-15

Do you know the most basic need of the human soul? Self-worth. You may have thought the answer would be, 'to be loved'; but being loved is simply the most important way in which we *gain* self-worth - to know that we matter to at least one other person. Someone cares about us. If no one cares, if we do not matter to anyone, then what is the point in being? The other way we gain self-worth is significance; I can do something, I can make a difference somewhere to someone or something. This need for self-worth is a force which drives us on, either to make others notice us or to prove to ourselves that we have a right to exist. This is a great big world, but I *do* matter, I *do* count, don't I?

Do you remember the story about the disciples, as they walked along behind Jesus, arguing about which of them was greatest? They were seeking to bolster up their self-confidence, gaining self-worth; "I am important, aren't I?" We all do it. Whenever I was decorating a room, I used to call my wife in to inspect almost every piece of wall-paper I put up; simply so that she could tell me how clever I was. We are all so insecure in so many ways; we need others to approve of us.

When Jesus and his disciples met for the last supper, it had all been arranged in secret because, of course, they were celebrating the Passover a day early. On the actual day, the Friday, Jesus was crucified as the true Paschal lamb. So there was no servant there to wash their feet. None of the disciples offered to do it because that would be demeaning and would place them lower than the others. In fact Luke records in his Gospel that at the last supper a dispute broke out again about which of them was greatest. Perhaps it was that which prompted Jesus to act out his teaching that the one who would be greatest must be the servant of all. In the course of the meal, he got up, laid aside his garment, put a

towel round his waist and, filling a bowl with water, he begins to wash the feet of his disciples. But did you notice what scripture says immediately before that?

Jesus, well aware that the Father had entrusted everything to him, and that he had come from God and was going back to God... (John 13:3).

Do you see? Jesus knew who he was. He had his self-worth; he had his significance - the Father had entrusted everything into his care; he knew where he belonged and that he was loved - he had come from God and was about to return to God; God loved him. So he was free of the need to impress anyone else, he knew who he was; and in that security he didn't worry what anyone else thought of him. So he took a towel and a basin of water and washed his disciple's feet. He could happily take the role of a servant because he knew he was the Son of God.

You need to be set free from the ways of the world, from the need to impress others in order to gain your self-worth. Like Jesus, you need to know who you really are.

First you need to recognise that you were created a dependent being. God never designed you to be independent. The first sin of mankind was the desire to be independent - 'eat this fruit and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. You will be free to make up your mind what you will do.' Christ, the second or last Adam, the one who perfectly fulfilled what man was intended to be, said, "A body you have prepared for me, I come to do your will, O, God." Your desire for independence, to run your own life is the basic sin which leads you into all the other sins. You need to submit to God and hand your life over to him.

When Jesus came to Simon Peter to wash his feet, he refuses to allow it. That is the initial reaction of all of us to Jesus. "I can manage on my own. I will gain my own salvation. I will prove

my significance, my self worth; I will make God and everyone else accept me by what I can do." It takes courage to admit, "I can't make it on my own; I'm a failure." Failure is a sign of weakness, of having little or no self-worth.

In Peter's case it is more subtle, it is a false modesty, a false shame. Perhaps the sight of Jesus, his Lord and Master, having to wash their feet because he, Peter, was too proud to offer to do it himself, shamed him. But, you see, because he was ashamed of himself that damaged his sense of self-worth. So he says, "You, Lord, washing my feet?"

As much as to say, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should do this for me." That is true, of course, but it is still a defence, Peter is hiding behind a false humility. He needs to be broken, to have his false humility stripped away. "Peter you have to face yourself, the person you are. Just *saying* you are not worthy is not enough." We can do the same thing. We can say that we are sinners and that we are not worthy that Jesus should die for us, and that can be a defence. We have opened the door into ourselves a little bit and we don't like what we see and rather than face the depth of our sin we say hurriedly, "I am a sinner, Lord forgive me." But if ever we are to be free of it, Jesus needs to say to us, "Exactly how have you sinned? Spell it out," so that we face it, recognise it, admit it and know exactly where our weakness is and what we must avoid in future.

Peter said, "I will never let you wash my feet". "If I do not wash you," Jesus replied, "you are not in fellowship with me."

We need to rely on Jesus totally for our salvation. The fault with most of us is that we think we can manage all right for much of our life and only rely on Christ for the bits where we can't manage, where we have slipped up. We let Jesus deal with our sins, but do not let him have control of our life. If you plan to

cross the Atlantic, you can do it by sea or by air. You commit yourself totally to the boat or to the aircraft. If you decide to go by boat and you get into difficulties the plane cannot help you out. Christ is not interested in simply forgiving your sins; he wants your whole life.

Then an interesting thing happens. Dear, impetuous Peter swings to the other extreme.

"Then, Lord, not my feet only, wash my hands and head as well.

I notice that many Christians tend to do the same thing. It is so difficult to get them to see first of all that they are sinners and cannot earn their own salvation; all, all is of Christ. But then they do not believe that they are redeemed. Christ saves us to use us. We are not anything in ourselves but we are everything we should be once we are his. Paul has got the balance right when he says, "If anyone is in Christ there is a new creation," and "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Jesus explains to Peter that once a person has surrendered his life to him, he doesn't need to be washed all over again. Oh, he will still slip up, he will fail here and there and needs to have this or that sin recognised, confessed and forgiven, he needs his feet washed as it were, but he is still a Christian; he hasn't gone back to his old way of living independent of God.

Understand that you are no longer a miserable sinner. You will be of little use to God if that is your attitude towards yourself. You will have no self-worth at all. Look, Jesus loved you enough to die for you; he could have chosen to save his own life or yours and he chose yours; that is how precious you are to him. What is more, you are able to serve him - there is your significance. If you are married, you have the tremendous privilege of supporting and encouraging your husband or wife as they develop towards

maturity and become the person God designed them to be. If you have children, you have the privilege of setting them upon the path of life in the right direction. If you are not married, think of all the people you can affirm and encourage. They need a sense of self-worth too. You can help them see how important they are to God by letting them see how important they are to you.

Jesus was able to take the role of the servant, because he knew who he was. He knew what God had committed to his care, and he knew he was the Son of God, deeply loved by his Father.

But so are you. Scripture tells us that all who are willing to receive Jesus - take him into their lives as Lord and Saviour - themselves become a child of God. O, believe that. Go through the world, not doing all you can think of to win the approval of others and seek their praise, but knowing your relationship with the Creator of everything. Stop trying to impress people at work or on the P.C.C., in the bible-study group or wherever, with your importance or your knowledge, and concentrate instead on building *them* up. Serve them as Jesus was free to serve his disciples. You *are* important; you are a deeply loved child of God whom he has gifted to do his will. Dare to believe it and stop grovelling.

When Jesus had washed the feet of all his disciples, including Judas Iscariot, he asked them,
"Do you understand what I have done for you?"

Let me ask you the same question. Do you understand what Jesus has done for you? He has fulfilled your right and good need for self-worth. You do matter, immensely, to him. You are a child of God, and have become an inheritor of his kingdom. So hold your head high, believe in yourself, in him. You have been set free to serve - what does it matter if other people see you, therefore, as a servant?

"If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. I have set you an example; you are to do as I have done for you."