

Do Good Anyway
Holy Thursday
North East United Methodist Church
April 18, 2019
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Throughout the scriptures we see the disciples lose focus...and each time Jesus has to get them back on track, has to get them refocused.

This is exactly what happened on this night over two thousand years ago...Jesus had entered Jerusalem just a few days earlier to shouts of "*Hosanna...Hosanna...Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.*" Monday, Jesus stormed through the Temple, turning over the moneychanger's tables. Many people were in Jerusalem, from all over the known world, for the Passover celebration, remembering how God delivered the Israelites out of slavery, out of Egypt, through the Red Sea.

Jesus prepared to have His last meal with the disciples...the Passover meal. Jesus knew this would be His last meal with His friends...the scriptures say in John 13:1, "*Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.*"

To the very end...His focus was not on Himself...not on His upcoming death...but on His friends...loving His friends...teaching them...

Jesus took the bread, gave thanks to His Father in heaven, and turned to His disciples telling them, "*This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.*" Jesus wanted them to later look back and realize the bread that was broken was truly the body of Christ Himself...broken for them...for us...for our salvation...Jesus took the cup, gave thanks to His Father in heaven, and told His disciples, "*This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you...*" They didn't quite understand that night what was happening, but later, after Christ's blood had been spilt on a Roman cross, they would look back and realize that Christ was showing them His death and sharing with them that in His death there would be forgiveness, a cleansing of their sins by His blood.

Jesus was saying in the bread and in the wine..."I love you..." "I love you so much that I am going to die for you..."

The disciples didn't get it...Jesus had just shared with them His love...that His body would be broken and His blood spilt for them...but they didn't get it...in fact, the focus shifted back to themselves...

Jesus mentioned, in Luke 22:22, "*And truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed.*" Suddenly, the focus was off of Jesus...off of bodies being broken and blood spilt...off of "*for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God*"

Suddenly, the focus shifted to them...who could be the betrayer...and if there is a betrayer...then there is also a favorite...a most loyal disciple...who could that be? The disciples begin to argue...forgetting that someone will betray their Lord...the One they love...they argue...Luke 22:24, *"Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest."*

How often do we find ourselves here? With the disciples? God is trying to teach us something...trying to remind us of His sacrifice...His love...but we are more focused on ourselves...we are more focused on those around us...what they are doing wrong or what we are doing right...God desperately tries to reach us with His love and we are judging our neighbor or are centered on our selves, our issues, our needs.

Like the disciples...there are a lot of times we just don't get it...

So, what does Jesus do...Jesus sees clearly that they are not getting it...Jesus knows He needs to not only tell them but show them...He needs to bring them back into focus...help them see what is truly important...

So, Jesus, the hands that helped create the universe...Jesus, the hands that healed the lepers...Jesus, the hands that calmed the storm and fed five thousand...Jesus, the hands that would open and choose the nails for our salvation...Jesus, the hands that held humanity...Jesus knelt down and washed the disciples' dirty, grimy, filthy feet...

Read John 13: 1-17, 34-35.

Jesus not only tells them of His love in the breaking of the bread and the giving of the cup...but Jesus shows them His love and gives them an example of the love they should show others by washing the disciples' feet.

Jesus wanted to make it clear to His disciples and us...that when we lose focus...when we begin to look inward at ourselves...our needs...our wants...when we begin to lose track of what God has done for us...how much Christ was willing to sacrifice for us...we need to put on a towel and wash our neighbor's feet...we need to develop a servant's heart.

Steve May tells the story of a pastor who was counseling a woman on the verge of nervous breakdown. He writes, *"She was powerless against the multitude of problems she faced, and she asked her pastor, 'What can I do? What can I do?'" He asked, "If I tell you what to do, will you do it?" She said, "Yes." Knowing that her schedule included free time during the week, and that she loved to cook, he said, "On Monday, I want you to bake some bread. On Tuesday afternoon, take it to the nursing home. Go into the common area where everyone watches TV and plays checkers, pass out the bread and talk to people. Stay for at least an hour. Don't worry about not knowing anyone; you'll know them all before you leave. On Wednesday, bake cookies. On Thursday afternoon, take them to the children's hospital and find a worker to help you pass them out to the kids who most need*

a visitor. Talk to as many of them as you can. Stay for at least an hour. On Friday, come back and see me."

"It was obvious, as she left his office that day that she didn't think much of his plan. The following Friday, he was disappointed that she didn't keep her appointment. About three weeks later she came to see him again. "Sorry I haven't been back sooner," she said, "I'm working at the cancer center everyday, and I've been so busy. Our Sunday School class is taking on this project together." He said, "But how about you? How are you coping?" "Coping with what?" she asked. "Everything's fine. All those things I was worried about before, I've forgotten them."

Jesus said, *"Whoever loses his life for me will find it"* (Matthew 16:25). We see this principle at work when we lose ourselves in service to him. As you read the Gospels, you see again and again that Jesus challenges us to devote our lives to living for others. In fact, he equates serving others with serving God. Jesus says, in Matthew 25:40, *"The king will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me'"*

Paul writes in Philippians 2:5-7, *"Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form."*

A businessman once asked his Bible study group, *"How can you tell if you have a servant attitude?"* *"By the way you react when you are treated like one,"* was the reply.

It's not easy to find an attitude like that. But for a disciple, servanthood is one of the keys to growing in Christlikeness. Describing His own ministry, Jesus said: *"For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many"* (Mark 10:45).

Are you following Jesus' example of servanthood, or like the disciples are you easily distracted and focused on yourself, your needs, your wants? Jesus calls you to kneel down and wash the feet of your neighbor...to take your focus off your own problems and place them on another, just as He did that night...that Holy Thursday...taking His thoughts off of His upcoming suffering and death and placing them on His friends, James, John, Peter...[add names of congregation here]. Who can you reach out to this week? Who can you serve? Who can you care for...bake for...shop for...hug...visit...write...love? Whose feet can you wash? Who can you serve as Christ has served you? More importantly than who...will you?

Mother Theresa said it best...

People are illogical, unreasonable and self-centered. Love them anyway.

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. Do good anyway.

If you are successful, you win false friends and true enemies.	Succeed anyway.
The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.	Do good anyway.
Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.	Be honest and frank anyway.
The biggest men with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest men with the smallest minds.	Think big anyway.
People favor underdogs, but follow only top dogs.	Fight for a few underdogs anyway.
What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.	Build anyway.
People really need help, but may attack you if you do help them.	Help them anyway.
Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth.	Give the world the best you have anyway.

Amen!