

Receiving or Resisting Grace

Living with Grace:

John 13:1-17
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One day I invited some people to a restaurant for a celebration. I knew the bill would be large, and I knew that we had the money that month to cover the expense. I quietly instructed the waitress to slip the check to me, and I paid it before anyone knew anything. As I thanked people for coming and they discovered that there was no bill, the protestations started. You would have thought I was loaning them the meal, and they were going into debt. Some were agonizing. They wanted no part of my gift. It's as if I had done them a disservice. How would you have reacted? Would you have received the gift and seen it as an opportunity to bless someone else down the road? Would you have been upset and resentful? What would you have done with this grace or gift?

In the waning moments of Jesus' life, he did something even more unexpected than I did. He interrupted the Passover meal. He got up from the meal, took off his robe, wrapped a towel about his waist, poured water into a basin, and began to wash and dry the feet of his disciples. He knelt at the feet of each, including a man named Judas. Now Judas was upset. He was angry because of an incident in the village of Bethany. Judas was incensed when Mary dumped a \$69,000-jar of perfume on Jesus' feet. That's the 2005 annual household income average in northwest Rochester and that is what the perfume cost, a year's wages (John 12:4-8; Mark 14:5) according to Judas. Judas would know. He was treasurer for the disciples. Judas was bitter; and he did not welcome the towel and basin of Christ. Only his feet were affected by Jesus' actions. His heart remained cold. Can you see blessing when your heart is cold? Can you recognize the

kindness of God when you are upset? How many acts of kindness never sink into our hearts because they've become stony with anger or disillusionment? How much grace goes unused, not tasted because we are bitter or cynical? We kneel for Holy Communion, but all we taste is a little bit of bread and wine. We receive nothing else, and we feel nothing else. Someone serves us in love; but in the end, all we experience is the service, not the kindness or love it expresses. We're angry. We're disappointed. We're upset, and the gift means little. Judas resisted the grace Christ offered him because he was too upset.

Do you remember the story of Naaman? He was a four-star general, the top commander, of the Syrian army and he traveled to Israel to see Elisha, a great prophet. He needed healing, but Elisha didn't even meet him. He sent a servant to the door with instructions for the general to wash seven times in the Jordan River. Naaman had not expected that response. He thought Elisha would come out wave his hands over him, apply some medicine, send him on a noble mission or just pray for him. Naaman turned away in great anger. His friends convinced him to follow the instructions of Elisha despite his fear of looking foolish. Naaman was cured of leprosy when he got over his anger and followed the instructions he was given. Like Naaman our expectations and emotions can get in the way of receiving grace. How do you expect God to heal you? What method do you expect him to use? Are you disappointed with Christ's church? Are we not living up to your expectations? The very people who turn you off most, even rightfully turn you off, might be the most critical for your health. God doesn't use perfect people. There are none. God uses people who believe. All kinds of imperfect people believe; and God does wonders through their faith. How often are you acting in the emotions of Judas or in the expectations of Naaman and resisting the grace God has for you?

Another disciple struggled with Jesus' action. He was not bitter. He was not cynical. He was not fearful. Instead, Peter was humiliated and horrified. Listen to the dialogue:

He (Jesus) came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." (John 13:6-11, NIV)

Jesus' humble act of service broke what Peter thought was proper protocol. The one he should serve was serving him. "How terrible!" he must have thought, "This puts me in the wrong place. I'm capable of doing this and should have done it for Jesus." However, Jesus was not the only one with dirty feet. All of the disciples needed cleansing. All would benefit from such a gift of service. Peter wasn't thinking about that. He was focused on protocol when he declared: ***"You shall never wash my feet!"*** Where do you think Peter fit in that protocol? Do you think he saw himself taking the form of a slave with others? Do you think he saw himself undeservedly receiving and then giving in life? Or do you think Peter saw himself earning and achieving with hard work. Jesus' act injured Peter's pride. Jesus didn't break proper protocol. He broke Peter's pride. ***"Unless I wash you, you have no part with me,"*** said Jesus.

That's the gospel. Unless you receive from Jesus, you cannot taste and then share what belongs to Jesus. Unless you receive grace, you won't be gracious. Unless you receive forgiveness, you won't forgive. Unless you receive love, you won't really love with the purity of love that people need. The gospel is not about what you achieve for Christ. It is about what you personally receive from Christ.

Peter heard that he could have no part of Christ unless Jesus washed him. Peter decided that he wanted to receive more than the others. He said, ***“Then, Lord, not just my feet but my hands and head as well!”*** Do you think Peter was still prideful? I think so too. However, now that Peter was ready to receive, Jesus didn’t focus on pride. Instead, he said that a person who’s taken a bath doesn’t need to be washed all over to be clean. Just the feet that has been soiled needs attention. Then alluding to Judas, Jesus notes that not all are clean. Judas still needed a bath in grace. His heart had been attracted to Jesus, but it did not trust Jesus.

Last week, we heard wonderful testimonies from our brothers and sisters who are being saved from drug and alcohol addictions. A number mentioned how they were saved. By that they meant that they experienced the bath of Christ’s grace. In other words, they were saved from judgment for their sins. They were saved and growing in their identity as forgiven children of God. However, God’s salvation is not complete in their life. They still need the assistance of their brothers and sisters in removing the stains of addiction and other sins. Once they took the bath, they didn’t need another bath. They didn’t need another new heart or another new identity. They just needed continual cleansing of their new heart from the thinking and lies that hold them fast in their addictions and various sins.

When we receive Holy Communion, some of us need a bath. We have yet to taste the wonderful love of God and have our hearts burst into flames of love and faith. Others only need cleansing from some specific sins that weigh them down. Some need physical healing. All of us need grace. Will our expectations, our disappointment, our emotions, our pride, our sense of protocol get in the way? Will we let our brothers and sisters wash our feet? Will we receive what they have to give us, or will we miss the grace God has for us?