

Have you ever been in the position where you just know you're the best in the room? Maybe in school you were the top student in a particular subject while your friends struggled to understand? Or perhaps you were far and away the most talented player on a sports team? Or maybe you're the best cook in our family, or the best knitter, or singer or whatever it may be. It feels good to be the best, to know that in that particular moment we can have it all, it feels good to relish in the hard work which got us there, the natural talent and ability which got us to the top. While being the best at something can be a great feeling it also comes with temptations. It can be tempting for us to lord our abilities, our talents over others. After all it seems fair that being the best would put us at the top of the heap, the head of the class and so naturally it makes sense that we are better than others, and we might as well let them know. Being the best at something also comes with the temptation to build ourselves up, to use our talents and abilities not to help or serve others but rather to bring ourselves more glory, to bring ourselves greater honour and prestige.

In our passage from the Gospel of John this evening we heard some pretty remarkable things about Jesus, we heard that Jesus knew that God the Father had given all things into his hands, we heard that he had come from God and that he was going to God. This is amazing stuff. John is telling us that Jesus is the Son of God, that was with God the Father from the beginning and that ultimately he was returning to be with God. And not only is Jesus the Son of God, not only does he exist eternally with the Father, but also that everything in Creation was given into his hands, everything belonged to Jesus, we heard that Jesus is Lord of everything. If anyone had the right to boast, to show off his talents or abilities, to build himself up it was Jesus. Jesus can claim everything for himself, since God has ordained that he is Lord of all.

So after hearing that God has handed all things into Jesus' hands, after hearing that Jesus had come from God and was going to God, we might expect the disciples to be worshipping at his feet, serving his every pleasure, we might expect to hear Jesus barking commands at his disciples to get him more wine, since after all if he is the Son of God he deserves every bit to be served, he deserves all the honour and glory the disciples can throw at him.

So what does Jesus do immediately after these remarkable words are spoken of him, he gets up from his seat, strips off his outer robe and ties a towel around his waist and proceeds to kneel before his disciples and wash their dirty road weary feet. Let's be clear here, their feet would have been filthy: they lived in a dusty climate, and would have been wearing sandals at best, without the benefit of socks and closed toed shoes to protect their feet from dirt and pretty much anything else. Jesus kneels down before his disciples, he takes a place beneath the ones who rightly should be serving him and instead performs one of the most servile actions of his day. This is what Jesus does with the knowledge that everything has been placed in his hands. He literally takes his disciples feet into his hands. Think about that: this is the Son of God, who the Father has given Lordship and dominion over the whole created order, and he chooses to wash his disciples' feet, he chooses to do the most menial thing imaginable. He shows his disciples, and us, that tender love, care and mercy are how will mark his Lordship, that radical service, radical love are more important to him and to God the Father than all the pomp, and glory he was due.

In this act of love and service Jesus reveals to us the very heart of God, he reveals to us what the Kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus looks like. He declares to us that the Kingdom of God is a Kingdom of love and not hatred. He declares to us that the Kingdom of God is a Kingdom where serving one another, caring for one another's needs is primary. He declares to us, that in the Kingdom of God, power is not shown in might and oppression, but in weakness and liberation.

Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into his hands, and he chose to serve others in abundance, he chose to use what he had been given to build others up rather than himself. "He emptied himself taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross."

Jesus declared that his Kingdom would be a Kingdom where power, abilities, talents would not be lorded over others and he invited his disciples to enter his Kingdom, to follow the example of love and service that he had set for them. We too, are invited into his Kingdom, we too are invited first to receive the tender care, love and mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and then to follow his example. As disciples we are first called to bathe in the radiant grace of God, to receive the abundant riches of his Kingdom and then just as the disciples before us we are called to share those riches with others, to tenderly care for our brothers and sisters in Christ, to share our own love and mercy with one another. As disciples our lives are should be marked by service to one another, our lives should be marked by building one another up in love.

We may not be called to literally wash each other's feet, but we are called to take the position of a servant with each of our brothers and sisters in Christ, we called to use the abilities, talents and gifts we have been given not for our own gain but for the life in the Kingdom of God, to care and serve others. Are you a gifted cook? Teach others to share in joy you find in cooking. Are you gifted with numbers and all things financial? Offer your services to helps those who are befuddled by the very thought of a budget or tax returns. Do you have authority or power at work or in your community? Use it to serve the needs of the under privileged, the powerless and the oppressed. Whatever your gifts may be, Jesus calls us to use them in service of others, to share the abundant riches we have received at his hands with others.

As we love one another in this way, seeking the well-being and care of others above our own, Jesus promises that everyone will know that we are his disciples. People will know that we live in the Kingdom of God, by the love we share for one another. Two thousand years of history will attest to the fact that more often than not the Church has struggled to with this, it has struggled and often failed to be truly marked by the love that Christ showered upon us, and which he calls to shower upon one another. Serving one another is a difficult task, loving one another, and I mean truly loving each other is hard, but we do not do it alone. Each and every day, each and every time we gather together we are showered with grace, mercy and love of God to carry us through.

Remember that God the Father gave all things into Jesus' hands, and he chose to kneel down at our feet, and take our dirty and road weary feet into his hands and showered his tender care and love upon us.

Amen.