

Message
August 1-2, 2009
Ruth 4:7-8; John 13:1-16
Walking in Another's Shoes
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So, we're remembering that we're talking over these next weeks about service. You just heard a powerful testimony of service. We give thanks for how folks so willingly tells their story of service that lights up their life.

This morning when you came into worship, you noticed as you were walking through the tent, opportunities for service. Service wears many different hats. We can cook, and stack cans, and build, and visit, and spruce up and mentor and just show up. I hope you'll look under the tent on your way out today and sign up. If you'd like to share some prayers and reflection time around service, in your bulletin is a home devotional for you to share in your gathering time. Then, on September 13 at our 16th birthday we'll be celebrating our times of service as we give thanks to God for all the blessings he bestows upon us, especially how he calls us to be his servants.

Some servants live big and make a huge impact changing the world. Archbishop Daniel Deng Bul of Southern Sudan has been spending some time with us recently. He believes from the bottom of his heart that Jesus calls him to bring peace to his nation, and he believes that we as the church in the world can help him with this effort. So, we'll try our best to serve. Those servants like Archbishop Daniel, Mother Teresa and Abraham Lincoln, they're few and far between. I'm not so familiar with those types of servants.

I'm more familiar with the servants who fix meals all day, pick up, do chores, drive kids back and forth, have a listening ear and a comforting word and a warm embrace; Those who walk into really difficult situations and bring wisdom and clarity; those who are not worrying about where we live or what we wear or what our vocation may be. Instead, they're the servants who see all in their path just as Jesus sees us, with love; I'm grateful for those loving servants who come into my life when it's at its ugliest and just sit with me, willing to listen and don't give advice until I ask for it. We all know servant types. Well, guess what, we're all those servant types. That's how Jesus calls it.

Now, Jesus shows us servanthood in lots of ways. In Matthew's gospel he tells the story of a master who forgives a servant's debt. In Luke's gospel Jesus teaches humility with the sheep herders in the field. In Mark's gospel he reminds us that he comes, "not to be served; but to serve."

So Jesus teaches us. He washes the feet of those closest, the disciples. Now, closest doesn't necessarily mean those safest. One who will betray him and one who will deny him are at the table. But, in acts of service, we learn of Jesus' trusting love; love that is patient, and forgiving. We walk in another's shoes, and the pathway suddenly is very different from the safety of our net. That's how Jesus does it, and he asks us to do the same.

In Jesus' time, when you arrived at someone's home, often a bucket of water and a towel stood at the door. A servant would wash and dry your bare feet as you entered the house. This is a sign of hospitality that you're a very welcome guest. Hospitality in ancient Israel is considered an essential custom of receiving a stranger as a cherished friend. Strangers invited into a community are under the guided protection of a patron or a host. A host never offends or insults their new friend; and is always attentive to their needs. At the same time, stranger friends honor their host.

Beginning August 15 we'll receive a couple dozen men and women into our Christ Church home through CARITAS. When they arrive on that Saturday night, they will have struggled through long days of homelessness, for whatever reason. Our Christ Church family will greet our guests, and share a delicious home cooked meal at a beautifully set table, with welcome conversation, some recreation and bible study and a peaceful, safe night's rest.

For Jesus, extending hospitality means giving all that we possess, all that we own to the one whom we serve. So a guest in our home has the very rights of ownership and possession of all that we have, just as we do. We're more than walking in another's shoes; we're actually giving the other our shoes.

Well, I imagine each and every one of us here is accustomed to receiving guests. We're happy to welcome people into our homes, and to even extend hospitality to the lengths of first century Palestine. But, Jesus is asking us to go a step further.

Jesus, getting up from the dinner table, lays down his garments, takes on the wardrobe and the stance of a servant, and washes the feet of his disciples, inviting them into the most intimate, loving, humble relationship, of servanthood.

Servanthood doesn't mean we're enslaved, that we put ourselves in harmful positions; that we care for other's needs at the cost of our own selves. Servanthood is about what our baptism promises, that with God's help, we'll act like Jesus, we gather as a faithful community, giving thanks and praise; that we'll always turn and say, "I'm sorry" and ask for Jesus to forgive us; that we'll do our best in our actions to love with Jesus' hands, to see with his eyes; that we'll look for the face of Jesus in everyone we meet, especially those people whom we really don't want to be around; that in our actions we're seeking what is right and just; what is peaceful. Servanthood is about expressing our relationship with God.

Let me tell you about two men who have chosen to walk in another's shoes. One is John Thomas. John Thomas is grateful for his gifts of patience and compassion. Little did he know that offering up these gifts would launch him into a life of service.

Last year, John Thomas' little brother learned to ride a two wheeler. His brother has tried for years to learn how to ride a bike. But, over time, he's felt he was a failure. He's lived in fear about riding a bike. So, last summer, along with John Thomas, he came to Lose the Wheels camp. At camp, he's surrounded by a community of people walking in

another's shoes. People who offer up love, compassion, energy and encouragement. That's all it takes to be a servant with Lose the Wheels.

John Thomas' brother learned to ride a bike in two hours at camp after years of struggling. He got on that bike and rode like the wind and all celebrated. But, John Thomas celebrated most of all. He said, "I was able to be a part of his success." Now John Thomas spends his summers traveling around the country with Lose the Training Wheels bike camp, helping other children learn to ride a two wheeler.

Dr. Richard Klein is a retired University of Illinois professor of engineering. Today, though, we know Dick as the inventor and master of the Lose the Training Wheels bicycle. He calls himself a bible studying rocket scientist and he's convinced there are biking stories in the bible. Dick didn't know that in his retirement God would lead him to design a bike that would change the lives of literally, thousands of children all over the world. Dick travels from camp to camp training other faithful servants in how to teach kids to ride.

Dick and John Thomas walk in another's shoes. They didn't know they would walk in another's shoes. They didn't know they'd be building and riding bikes all over the world. But, Jesus said, copy me, and they responded.

So, we take time to walk in another's shoes. Here's why and what happens when we walk in another's shoes...

1. Jesus says so. He says, "I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you." I love this about Jesus. Just incase we're not sure what it looks like, he shows us. In Greek the word for serving also means worship. Jesus says, copy me and you are offering up praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. We want to do it. We're blessed. The writer of John's gospel tells us that Jesus loves those who are with him. Not some kind of superficial love. This is a love so deep that he is willing to go to the cross for us. When he kneels down to wash our feet, he's cleansing away all that brings hurt and sorrow. And, when he humbly rubs us dry with that towel, he's covering us with his blessing, with the tenderness of his love. His care for us is the invitation to share in the blessing of his love. We're washed in the desire to serve. So, we surrender to God's will for us and the desire to serve is natural because God is working in us and we want to please God. Taking the time to share means we have a share in Jesus.
3. We'll suspend judgment. This past week, I asked a friend what she thought it meant to walk in another's shoes. She said, "suspend judgment." When we decide to take off the cloak that protects our way of thinking, put on trust, and kneel at the foot of other's, doors are opened. And, when judgment is suspended, our hearts are softened, and we're just free to love more, celebrate more; to live with joy.

4. We discover things about ourselves we didn't know possible. One young, very accomplished friend said last week, "I've always known how to ride a bike...but now I can teach someone else to ride a bike! I'm putting that on my resume!" In seeking to serve others rather than ourselves, Jesus smiles; and we're reminded, that we're not alone in our service; we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

5. The number one reason why we walk in another's shoes, is because Jesus walked in our shoes. God came, as one of us, and entered fully into our brokenness, into our insecurities and uncertainties, into our anger and our self-doubt. God came and walked along, not just beside us, but as one of us. He came, knelt down, and slipped on our shoes, tied the laces, and stood, lifting us up, carrying our burdens, removing for us all that hinders and prevents so that we can be free, to love and serve, in his name, walking in his shoes. So, go, follow and be a copy cat. They will know us by our love.