First Baptist Church Merritt Island
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September 28, 2025
The Basin and the Towel
John 13:1-17, 34-35

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Have any of you sensed that our world seems to be getting more and more angry?

Church, we are blessed to have deacons who serve widows faithfully, who meet the needs of the body quietly, who pray for you, and who find joy in doing the smallest of tasks for your good and for God's glory. Their example helps us this morning to understand the passage we are learning from today because they stand in contrast to the pride of the disciples.

Our verses this morning take us to the upper room on the night before Jesus is to be crucified. The disciples did not understand the significance of the night. Jesus enters this room with affection, but the disciples enter it arguing about who among them is the greatest.

Last week Pastor Titus reminded us that ungodly anger comes from not loving what God loves. Today we see the inverse of that statement is equally true: when love aligns with God's heart, it does not rise up in anger but it bends low in humility.

Let us hear it now in the Apostle John's own words in John 13:1–17. Now let us walk back through what we just heard and see the first posture: the posture of bending low.

<u>1. The Posture of Bending Low (vv1–5)</u>

Jesus never took a step apart from the Father's prompting. As He said, *"the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing" (John 5:19)*

And now, on this night like no other, He sits at the table with full awareness.

John 13:1
"Jesus knew His hour had come."

What did He know? He knew the cross was near. He knew all authority was His. He knew He was returning to glory. With all things known, with all power entrusted to Him, and with all glory secure:

John 13:4-5

"Jesus rose from supper. He laid aside His garments, and taking a towel, tied it around His waist. Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around Him."

Here the posture of Jesus comes into full view. This task was considered so lowly it could not even be required of a Jewish slave. The Promised Messiah and Exalted King took THAT place and stooped to the lowest posture.

And God's redeeming love has consistently been marked by God bending low to His creation. In creation, He stooped to the dust to form Adam in His image. In covenant, He stooped to dwell among His people in a tent of skins. In the incarnation, *"Christ Jesus, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." (Philippians 2:6–7)*

Do you see it? Jesus is revealing to His disciples that He will depart this world the same way He entered it. He lays aside His garments and girds Himself as a servant. And this is the scandal in the upper room.

The One with all authority chooses the posture of a slave. He rose from the table not to condemn their pride or to confront His betrayer. Instead, the love of Christ stoops low. He removes the garment. He takes fills the basin. He kneels before proud men. He washes the dust off of their feet.

But this was more than removing dirt. Jesus was giving them, and us, a living parable. Within twenty-four hours He would again lay aside His garment, again take the form of a servant. Only this time, He would not pour out water to cleanse the feet of man. He would pour out His blood to cleanse souls to all who would believe.

Core Truth 1: Christ's redeeming love takes the lowest place in humility.

Love has bent low. But what happens when that love is resisted? Because not every heart understands and receives His love poured out.

2. <u>The Posture of Receiving (vv6–11)</u>

And of course it is Peter whose voice resists.

John 13:6
He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?"

The hands that hold all authority now hold dirty feet, and Peter cannot fathom it. This is a fisherman telling the Son of God, "No. Never. This is not what Messiahs do. Kings wear crowns, not towels. Lords sit on thrones, not on floors." At his core Peter is saying, "You are not acting like the Lord I want You to be."

Church, hear this: Peter thought he was protecting Jesus, but in reality, he was resisting Him. And how much do we resemble Peter? How often do we refuse His cleansing because of pride? How often do we resent His cleansing of others, because in our pride we wanted Him to condemn them instead? How often do we refuse His love because it does not match our expectations?

I saw this up close in Amy's life. For years she prayed for family members she loved dearly but who were far from the Lord. After a long season without seeing change, she stopped. Why? Because if she stopped asking, she would not feel disappointed if God did not meet her expectations. That was not reverence; it was resistance. Not honor; it was unbelief. But God in His kindness revealed Himself and taught her heart to trust Him again with His work in her family, in His way, and in His time. And God proved Himself faithful.

That is Peter's heart here. And the whole passage turns on one sentence:

John 13:8
"Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."

That word *share* is meros. It means portion, inheritance, your place. In the Old Testament, Israel's portion was their share in the promised land, their covenant inheritance.

But here Jesus says, ***"Unless I wash you, you have no portion in Me. No place in My kingdom. No share in My life. No salvation."***

Here is the truth: The Savior's posture is humility that gives. The disciple's posture is humility that receives. In salvation, both kneel. His humility is not weakness but the strength to serve. Our humility is not passivity but the courage to yield, to let Him wash our filth of sin we cannot clean. This is salvation. A Savior's gift freely given. But a gift that must be received by you and me.

Peter was not in a posture to receive cleansing because he still did not understand. He did what we so often do, swing from resistance to overcorrection. Listen to Peter's response.

John 13:9
"Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"

I remember teaching Blake, Tanner, and McKenna to drive those narrow, hilly roads in Ringgold, Georgia. When they slipped onto the shoulder, the instinct was to yank the wheel too hard the other way. But that kind of overcorrection only made things worse.

That is Peter here. First, he refuses. Then he jerks the wheel of his heart too far the other way. And in both cases, he misses the point because he does not understand. But Jesus clarifies with grace:

John 13:10
"The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you."

Peter could not yet see the cross, but we can. What was hidden to him has been revealed to us. The basin pointed to the blood. The washing of feet pointed to the cleansing of our souls. And here is the power of the gospel:

John 13:10
"You are clean."

In Christ, by faith, and through grace, you are clean. He is yours and you are His.

Core Truth 2: Only Christ can cleanse us, and only a humbled heart can receive His salvation.

Jesus has bent low to cleanse, and the disciple's posture is to humbly receive. But His love does not stop there. The basin is not only for our cleansing. It is for our calling. The One who washes us now rises to send us, so that the posture we share in becomes the posture we live out.

3. The Posture We Live Out (vv12–17)

After He finishes, He looks around the room and asks one piercing question.

John 13:12
"Do you understand what I have done to you?"

He goes on to say:

John 13:14-15
"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you."

You were not in that upper room two thousand years ago. Your feet were not washed that Passover night. But if you are in Christ, you have received something infinitely greater. The basin and the towel pointed to Calvary.

The humiliation of foot-washing pointed to the greater humiliation of the Son of God, who poured out His blood to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Peter and the other disciples could not possibly grasp it all on that side of the cross. But we stand on this side of the cross, not only understanding, but sharing in and experiencing the salvation of Christ. Sharing in His salvation. Sharing in His Spirit. Sharing in His life.

And now He says:

John 13:15
"Do just as I have done to you."

Not in religious ritual, but in a natural response. The basin Jesus held in the upper room is now the basin we hold. Our basin is about laying down all our pride and loving one another as Christ loves. It is humility's way, because your crucified life now finds its life in Christ alone.

And do not miss this. We do not take up the towel in our own strength, but because He has already washed us and abides in us. His humility flows through us by His Spirit in us. This is the truest and purest place of one-anothering. To embody the deep, self-sacrificial love of Jesus. To take up the towel in your marriage. To pour out the basin in your friendships. To take humility's low place when conflict arises or when we encounter misunderstanding.

And when we live this way together, the world sees God's community marked not by pride, but by the posture of Christ Himself. And listen to the promise:

John 13:17
"If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

The blessing is not simply knowing. The blessing is in doing. True joy is found not in being served, but in serving. The way of the basin and the towel is the way of blessing.

Core Truth 3: What Christ has done for us, we now live out toward one another.

<u>4. The Posture That Defines Us (vv34–35)</u>

After the basin and the towel, Jesus gives a final word to define His people.

John 13:34-35
"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

The newness of this command is not that love itself had never been spoken of before. What is new is the measure, the model, and the power found in: *"as I have loved you."* The love that stooped in coming to earth, the love that bent the upper room, the love that bore all humiliation upon the cross, THAT love is now the defining posture of every disciple.

This is not optional. This is the way of the follower of Jesus. This is the witness by which the world knows who belongs to Jesus. And church, this is what we mean when we say: "Make Church Smaller."

In the month of October, you are going to hear that phrase a lot, because this is a core desire of your pastors for us as a church. It is not about programs or events, though those will be planned to give opportunities to know and be known among one another. It is not simply about gathering in smaller spaces, though that is always helpful.

At its core, “Make Church Smaller” is this passage lived out by you, by us. Bending low in love toward one another. Extending and receiving forgiveness to one another. Sharing and living out our life in Christ with one another.

This is how the gospel moves from the basin in His hands to the basin in ours. This is how a big church becomes small: when the people of God love one another in the humility of Jesus.

Core Truth 4: Christlike love for one another is the defining mark of His disciples.

When Jesus asked His disciples, ‘Do you understand what I have done to you?’ He was saying more than, ‘Your feet are clean.’ He was saying, ‘My whole life has been a life bent low in love for you.’

Believer: This is now your calling. His bending low to the cross is not just what He did for you. It is what He has done *to you*, placing the measure, the model, and the power of His love upon and within your life. Do you understand? And if you do, will you walk in it, loving one another as Christ has loved you?

Unbeliever: Christ bent low in love for you. The eternal Son of God bent all the way down to the cross. He took your sin, bore your curse, and died your death so that you might be forgiven, cleansed, and raised to new life in Him. Do you understand? And if you do, will you respond? Will you turn from sin and trust in Jesus Christ as the One who bent low in love for you?