



THE FIRST WORD

FROM FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BONITA SPRINGS

You Will Understand Hereafter

SERMON BY REV. STEVEN GRANT ■ MAY 27, 2018

Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. ²During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him, ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, ⁴got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself.

⁵Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. ⁶So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter." ⁸Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." ⁹Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head." ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." ¹¹For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹²So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am.

¹⁴If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. ¹⁶Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

John 13:1-17 (NASB)

I have had Memorial Day very much on my mind lately, partly because the American Memorial Day observance always has a tremendous emotional impact on me. As a passionate student of American history, I have become intimately aware of the American story, the sacrifices that went into the making of that story, and the significance of those sacrifices. But this year was different still, because in addition to our own Memorial Day, I had the opportunity to observe Memorial Day in what has become my second home, the State of Israel.

A few weeks ago, 33 members and friends of First Presbyterian Church and I returned from another trip to the Holy Land. While we were there, Israel observed their Memorial Day. They do theirs a little differently in that the day after they observe their Memorial Day, they celebrate their Independence Day. Since the days are back to back they link them together. There is a day of memory and mourning followed by a day of celebration. What we experienced was that at a pre-arranged time—in this case it was at 11:00 AM—sirens went off and the entire nation stopped. No matter what you were doing, no matter where you were, you stopped for two minutes of silence just as we did this morning for a few moments at the beginning of our service. If you were in the middle of meeting, the meeting stopped, and everyone stood for the prescribed two minutes; if you were in your car, you pulled off to the side of the road, got out of your car, and stood for two minutes; buses stopped, trains stopped, everything stopped.

I must say, it was a very powerful experience to witness an entire nation honoring their fallen at precisely the same moment. It is not that Israelis are always so unified; they are not. They are not a homo-

geneous people in thought or lifestyle, in ethnic origin or even religion and, no, they do not think alike. In an attempt at some good Jewish humor, Rabbi Weinreb once wrote the following in an article to his Jewish audience:

We all nod our heads in agreement when we hear the phrase, “Two Jews, three opinions.” We similarly chuckle when we hear the anecdote about the Jew who was discovered after years of living alone on a desert island. His rescuers noticed that he had built two huts aside from the one he lived in. He told the puzzled people who saved him that they were *shuls*, or synagogues. When asked why he needed two *shuls*, he retorted, “One is the one in which I pray, and the other is the one into which I would never set foot.”

We Christians can be very much the same. We proudly point to the church we attend and say, “Yes, that’s my church ... but that church over there—I would never set foot into that one!” We Americans can be very much like this, too. We are very diverse people from all points on the earth. One of the things that is amazing and very unique about America is that anyone can become an American. Think about it. If I were to go to France, and even if I were to become a French citizen, I could never become “French.” But a French person could come to America and, just like me, become an American. America is a collage of humanity. It is one of our greatest strengths. Yet so often we resist it as if it were a detriment.

Today we are divided in spirit. I do not wish to imply that we should be one homogeneous people any more than our Israeli friends. Our freedom of speech and our freedom of conscience are things that we embrace and that we celebrate; the free exchange of ideas was meant to be used for our advantage. Not being of the same mind is not our problem. Our problem is the venom, it is the hatred, it is the demonization of those who do not agree with us or who live differently than we do. Such internal strife weakens us, and unity in its truest sense is less and less possible. My friends, there is not a military on this planet that can defeat ours. What threatens to bring America down is the division and the rot from within.

On Israel's Memorial Day, in that moment, they were one in the remembrance. It is reflected in a statement made by now Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to his supporters when then Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin was being vilified and attacked for a policy that Rabin was advocating. Netanyahu said, "He is not a traitor, though I believe he is making a big mistake. We are dealing with political rivals, not enemies. We are one nation." If only we could embrace this view in America! While it is true that we have very different opinions on which direction our country should go, we forget that we are all Americans.

You see, Israelis are very conscious of what is at stake. This is one of the reasons why Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, is so powerful. You may have been to other Holocaust museums, but this one is tremendous not only because of the subject matter, but because of how the main museum building is designed. In the middle of the campus, there is a long building that suggests the ark. You go in and out of all the exhibition rooms in this building starting with the rise of anti-Semitism through the rise of Nazi-ism and the horrors of the Second World War, and end with the victory over fascism. What is most important—and what is missed by most of the guests who come to see this—is the view at the end. When you get to the end of this building, as the architect intended, you look out over the countryside of Israel. This is to emphasize that while the supposed thousand-year Reich is destroyed and the Nazis are dust, the Jewish people they sought to exterminate are still here. They have a country of their own. But even today, the fact is that if an enemy of Israel were to prevail in a military conflict, the State of Israel would cease to exist. The Israelis live with the grim reality daily.

There was a time when this was also true in America. Think back in our history to the American Revolution. We came very close to being destroyed in the womb, so to speak. In the war of 1812, we were in danger of being snuffed out in our infancy. We were being torn apart in our adolescence during the horrific Civil War. Those of you who lived through World War II and the Cold War at least questioned whether America would survive as we knew it.

In our modern day I fear that America's strength, our prosperity, and our stability are simply assumed; it is taken for granted that our power and influence will always exist because that is just the way things are. We have also developed an incredible and all-pervasive sense of entitlement. We feel that we deserve all this. Somehow, we just expect these things because that is just the way it is. All the advantages, all the conveniences, everything that we have is just because of the way things are. Ladies and gentlemen, you know that is **not** just the way things are! Our country as it is, our way of life, our privileges are not a given. There were a multitude of people who went before us, who worked, who sacrificed, who fought, and many of whom gave their lives. Our nation is what it is because past generations made it so, and there are some among us who are still doing their part.

They did not agree on everything either. Believe me, they did not. But there was a commitment to something greater than themselves, and they built this nation. Will future generations have that same commitment? The more we emphasize personal privilege and glorify self-indulgence, the more we lose the sense of being a part of something greater than ourselves and take responsibility for being a part of it.

My friends, this is why Memorial Day is so significant. It is more than a day off work, a time for parties and Memorial Day sales. It is a time to reflect on who we are as a nation, why we are what we are, and how we got here. It is also a time to embrace what we must do together to maintain it, to secure it, and to chart our future. But first, we must remember.

It is said that George Washington's greatest achievement was what he did not do. He did not give up at Valley Forge or, for that matter, at Morristown—and he easily could have. In fact, he was advised repeatedly to do so, but by his supreme leadership skills, he kept an army in the field for seven years and brought the United States from an idea into a reality. As a result, George Washington, the "Father of our Country," became the embodiment of the American

Spirit by demonstrating that Americans do not give up! Americans do not quit! Americans have always had the commitment and the sense of responsibility to do what is right and what is required. Have we done it perfectly? No, of course not. There have been times in our history when we needed a vital correction. But no matter how difficult the challenge, Americans have always risen to the occasion because it is part of our DNA to be a part something greater than ourselves.

We read in Romans 5:3-5 how tribulations lead to perseverance and perseverance leads to character—meaning what kind of people we become and what we choose to be—and character leads to hope, and hope does not disappoint. So, the question this weekend for all Americans to ask is: What kind of people do we desire to be?

Our Scripture passage for this morning teaches us what kind of people Jesus wants His disciples to be. What is crucial about our looking at this passage today is that we must ask ourselves as disciples of Jesus, how do we witness to the larger community? It seems that we as a people are so fragmented that unity does not exist in our modern-day country. How do we as a church witness and speak into that culture. What example do we give?

Last week Pastor Allen gave a magnificent sermon about what the church should look like and how we should all be unified. But how does that happen? Do we just wave a magic wand and suddenly everything is okay? The problem is that as we live together we sin, we annoy each other, and we hurt each other. The next thing you know, relationships between people are estranged, broken, and fragmented. Perhaps you are on a committee and you think that the church should do one thing while another person thinks something else. Then the next thing you know, you are competing with each other and even end up fighting against each other. So how do we heal? How do we get to the unity we seek?

This is where our Scripture passage today is vital. Usually the way in which this foot washing business is interpreted is that since the Lord of the universe was willing to get down on the floor and serve His disciples, we should be willing to serve each other. There is noth-

ing particularly wrong with this interpretation. Certainly, the ideal of service was exemplified by the very people we are remembering this weekend; they gave the ultimate act of service. But I would suggest to you that there is so much more going on in this passage.

We get a clue right away in John 13:1 when the text says that Jesus “loved them to the end.” The end of what? In John 13:7, there is an even better clue by what Jesus tells Peter. “What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter.” If this were all about service, what is there not to understand? Why not just ask that Peter serve everyone else the way he was served?

The keyword here is **hereafter**. You will understand later. Later than what? What has not happened yet? The crucifixion! That very evening Jesus was going to be arrested. The next day He was going to be tried, convicted, humiliated, tortured and killed. He died for the forgiveness of our sins and for our reconciliation with God. What this foot washing is all about is **forgiveness** and **reconciliation**. Just as with the Last Supper, Jesus is trying to help them understand the New Covenant and what He is about to accomplish. With the foot washing, He is doing the same thing. It is what the core of the gospel is all about: God reconciling the world to Himself and the people to one another. This is our mission as a church and as individual Christians: to be God’s reconciling community, proclaiming and living out the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said to him, “He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.”

John 13:10

Jesus was saying that before they came to the Passover meal, they had no doubt performed the ritual cleansing required before the Seder meal. Because they had to walk through the dusty roads of Jerusalem to get to the Upper Room only their feet were dirty. It was not necessary to wash their whole body, although Peter had asked to have his head and hands washed as well. Jesus was saying that they already belonged to Him. He will pay the price for their sins and

they will be clean. Even so, as they walk the highways and byways of life, they will sin and make mistakes (i.e. they will get their feet dirty).

Do you need another conversion experience and another baptism every time you sin? No, because in essence you are clean; just your feet are dirty. You must deal with new sins as they take place. Jesus has already paid the price for these new sins, but we must learn how to deal with them. Jesus says, "Do you know what I have done to you?" (John 13:12). He does not say "what I have done **for** you," as some translations indicate, but "what I have done **to** you" as if He were saying, "I am changing you." He means that we must be willing to wash each other's feet and to forgive one another; to be reconciled with one another. As He does it for them, they should be doing it for others.

"If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you."

John 13:14-15

Even though they have been washed by His blood, they will sin, there will be division among them, they will have broken relationships. He needs them to be willing to wash one another's feet; to forgive and to be reconciled. Jesus continues:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

John 13:16-17

Notice the imagery He is using here. We usually do not like the idea of being a slave. We do not like using the word slave because of its connotations, but the way in which John is using the word and the way in which Jesus used it acknowledges that a slave does not belong to himself, he belongs to somebody else. As we become a disciple of Jesus, we must understand that our lives no longer belong to us. We belong to Him.

I hear people say, “It’s my life.” If you are a Christian, it is not **your** life; it belongs to Him and He is free to use it in any way He chooses. If you really are His disciple, you are not above Him. If He is willing to go to the cross to forgive you and to reconcile you to God, why would you not do what He does? This is crucial because reconciliation is the goal!

How do we get to unity? If you are not willing to show grace to one another, as Pastor Allen suggested, it will not happen. None of us are perfect. I need you to wash my feet when I fail. I need you to be willing to do this so that we can be reconciled. It is not always easy, and it is not always pleasant.

Jesus’ choice of a metaphor, an ugly job, as an example clearly demonstrates this. Sometimes doing this is not pleasant or easy, but where there is reconciliation there can also be unity. Later that evening, Jesus does pray for unity. In the next few chapters of John, while they are still in the Upper Room, Jesus shares His high priestly prayer. He prays for unity among His disciples and among His church, and that unity is not possible unless His people understand the meaning of the foot washing first.

I want to highly recommend a book to you called **One Blood: Parting Words to the Church on Race** (Moody Publishers, 2018) by John Perkins. The book is a series of sermons delivered at the Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago. He has an amazing testimony as someone who was in the forefront of the struggle for civil rights in America. The passage that I want to share with you now is in the Introduction. The basic premise of the book is that going back to the creation of Adam and Eve, God did not create different races but we all came from Adam, so we all came from **one blood**. Perkins writes:

The problem is that there is a gaping hole in our gospel. We have preached a gospel that leaves us believing that we can be reconciled to God but not reconciled to our Christian brothers and sisters who don’t look like us—brothers and sisters with whom we are, in fact, **one blood**.

The apostle John talks about that: “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20). We’ve taken out these key parts: reconciliation and the requirement for justice, essential and crucial parts of the gospel.

How do we, the disciples of Jesus, speak to the culture? What example do we give of the kind of unity we need? With the very different ideas about unity in our culture, if we do not see unity in the church, from where will it come? We must ask ourselves who we are going to be as the disciples of Jesus. It begins with each one of us as individuals. Ask yourself whose feet you need to wash. Not just in an act of service, but in forgiveness and reconciliation ... whose feet do you need to wash in your sphere of influence? Yes, the person that you are thinking of right now is the one to whom the Lord is referring.

Notice, Jesus did not need to be asked. His motivation came from within. He knew that God put all things in His hands; He had authority over all things; He came from God and He was going back to Him; He loved His disciples to the end. Likewise, we must not wait to be invited. We must take the initiative toward others. Friends, you might think that such forgiveness and reconciliation is an unsavory business that you would rather avoid. But consider what Jesus said in John 13:17: “You are blessed if you do them.”

What would you rather be a part of than continuing Jesus’ reconciling work in the world? To be His partner? To be His instrument? We only grasp this and get excited about this when we realize that our lives belong to Him. You might be thinking that this is impossible but remember that God placed all things in Jesus’ hands. Do you doubt what He can do? The question is, are we willing?

The foot washing needs to happen not only in our church, but in our nation as well. I pray that God’s will for the church will be made real in the sacrificial love of His people for each other. By our love, in this very church, may we set an example to the nation as a whole, embracing this vision and living it out. It is then that America will be truly blessed.

