

Jesus shows what real greatness is like

Sermon for Sunday, August 12, 2007
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Luke 22:24-27; John 13:4-15;
Matthew 20:28-34

Some of you may remember back in May when I was about to begin my last week of study leave. I was working on my final paper for my continuing education project, and it was due at the end of that week. The research was completed, and I had already written one hundred pages. But I still had to write another fifty pages in that week. I said, "One way or the other, this week will come and it will go. I don't know if I'm going to make it, but there is no stopping the march of time."

Well, I did manage to pull it together in time, and I submitted my paper. A couple of weeks ago I heard back that my professor approved it, and that I am ready to graduate from with my Doctor of Ministry degree.

From now on, when you speak to me, please use my proper title: you may call me "Reverend Doctor Fraser." If you're in town and you see me walking by, but I don't say "Hello," it's probably because I'm busy thinking deep and profound thoughts. I would appreciate it if you would not interrupt my concentration with your trivial concerns about illness and jobs and paying bills. I am much too important to be bothered with such things.

Someone interrupts me and reads:

Luke 22:24-27, Today's English Version:
An argument broke out among the disciples as to which one of them should be thought of as the greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the pagans have power over their people, and the rulers claim the title 'Friends of the People.' But this is not the way it is with you; rather, the greatest one among you must be like the youngest, and the leader must be like the servant. Who is greater, the one who sits down to eat or the one who serves? The one who sits down, of course. But I am among you as one who serves."

Someone else reads:

John 13:4-5, 12-15, Today's English Version:
So [Jesus] rose from the table, took off his outer garment, and tied a towel around his waist. Then he poured some water into a washbasin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist.

After Jesus had washed their feet, he put his outer garment back on and returned to his place at the table. "Do you understand what I have just done to you?" he asked. "You call me Teacher and Lord, and it is right that you do so, because that is what I am. I, your Lord and Teacher, have just washed your feet. You, then, should wash one another's feet. I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you."

Do you see the contrast between what I was acting like, and what Jesus taught and how he lived? I'd rather be like Jesus.

I then turned to Walter Ruggles, sitting near the front. He is a member of the church with whom I had arranged this ahead of time. I invited him to sit up on the platform where more people could see him. I asked him, "Walter, when was the last time you had someone wash your feet?" "Would you like me to wash your feet?" I pulled out a basin, a jug of warm water and a bar of soap, and did just that. Afterwards I dried them with a towel, and rubbed them with cream. Then I put his shoes and socks back on.

If I may paraphrase Jesus, I think he was saying, "Forget about being important. Forget about being great in the eyes of other people. Forget about your social status, your pride and prestige. Those things are worthless. What really matters is loving people, serving them. Do as I show you."

Matthew 20:28, New International Version:

The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Isn't this incredible? The Son of God is doing the job of a servant, slave. The one who is Lord over all the universe kneels before others and cares for their needs.

There's more. We just read Matthew 20:28. Let's continue that passage, and see how Jesus actually lives this principle of serving, of giving yourself away.

Matthew 20:29-34, New Living Translation:

As Jesus and the disciples left the city of Jericho, a huge crowd followed behind. Two blind men were sitting beside the road. When they heard that Jesus was coming that way, they began shouting, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" The crowd told them to be quiet, but they only shouted louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

Jesus stopped in the road and called, "What do you want me to do for you?"

“Lord,” they said, “we want to see!” Jesus felt sorry for them and touched their eyes. Instantly they could see! Then they followed him.

There’s a key word in that passage. A very important word. It says that Jesus *stopped*. If you want to be used by God, if you want to serve God, you must be willing to be interrupted.

Most of Jesus’ ministry and most of Jesus’ miracles were interruptions. Think about it. All the people he healed...the blind man, the lame man, the sick people, the paralyzed man, the dead child...all of them were interruptions.

What counts most of all isn’t your *ability* but your *availability*.

What keeps us from being available? Why do so many people say, “I’d like to be able to help, but I’m not available.”

The number one enemy of compassion is busyness. We just get too busy! And because I’m so busy, I don’t have time to serve. I’ve got my agenda, my plans, my dreams, my goals, my ambitions. You know what the problem is? We hang this (hold up a “Do not disturb” sign) on the door of our heart. We do it all the time. I’ve got my goals. I’ve got my safe little life going here, so don’t disturb me for the needs of other people.”

There was a professor who was working hard writing his next book, and was getting more and more frustrated by the students from his classes who kept coming to his office to ask questions or seek advice. One day – it was just like someone turning on the light in a dark house – it occurred to him that those students were not interruptions in his life. They were his purpose in life. That changed his whole outlook, not just at work, but elsewhere as well.

Real servants don’t mind being interrupted. If you really have a servant heart, like Jesus Christ, you don’t mind being interrupted because your agenda is God’s agenda. I read about a teenage girl who heard a sermon on ministry, and she taped a card to the mirror in her room, so she’d see it every day: “I am God’s servant. What will he have me do today?”

Whenever you see a need right in front of you, guess what? God is giving you the opportunity to practice serving. God is giving you the opportunity to become like Jesus Christ. Sure it will mean interrupting your plans for that day. But maybe God has a bigger purpose for your life than what you had planned for that day.