

'Membership's about ...'

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[0:00] Well, I'm guessing that you've all heard of this phenomenon that people are into called! Bucket lists, you know, the things you want to do before you kick the proverbial bucket.

And it seems people are getting creative with these sorts of things. There's even websites! now that list the top 30 things to do. So on one website, number one is hire two private investigators to investigate each other. I can think of better things to spend my money on actually. Or ride an elevator and every time the doors open go peekaboo, peekaboo.

Sometimes the elevators I mostly ride are those at the aged care homes and maybe if I reach the dementia floor they'll actually, if I do peekaboo. Or take a fishing rod to a pet store aquarium and see what they do. But here's the thing, Jesus had only one day left to live and you know what he did? He washed feet. Can you imagine that being on anyone's bucket list?

Yes, he also ate his last meal. Yes, he also taught his disciples. Yes, he also went to the garden of Gethsemane and prayed. But he had one day left to live, less than a day to live actually, and he washed feet. Today we're looking at what church membership means. And before you all start taking off your shoes and socks, that's not quite the point Jesus was making. Rather, it's about serving others because he first served us. After all, it was servants who washed the feet of people in the ancient world, wasn't it? And so membership means serving like the sun.

I will look at how he serves in John chapter 13. We'll think about ways in which we can serve from different parts of the Bible. And then we'll end with an encouragement and a challenge to serve.

[2:02] But firstly, he serves sacrificially and lovingly. So point one in your outlines, verse one in your Bibles, it was just before the Passover festival, Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Here we're told it was just before the Passover festival.

And that year, the Passover fell the Thursday night before the first Good Friday. It ran from Thursday evening to Friday evening. The Jewish day started in the evening rather than the morning. And so for us, that's next Thursday that these events took place. And as we heard in our first reading, this festival was to remind them how they were once slaves in Egypt. And after lots of warnings, God would judge Egypt to force them to let his people go. But Israel was still in Egypt. And so a lamb was sacrificed and its blood put on the wooden door frames. So that when God saw the blood of the lamb, he would pass over the house of the Israelites and save them. Well, earlier in John's Gospel, when John the Baptist saw Jesus, he said, look, here is that Passover lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

Of course, to take away the sin of the world means to take away the judgment the world deserves because of their sin, because of our sin. And Jesus would do this by sacrificing himself like the Passover lamb and shedding his blood, not on a wooden door frame, but on a wooden cross. And that's what it means in verse one, when he says the hour had come. The hour in John's Gospel refers to that time when he would leave this world via the cross and then return to the Father. It was time to sacrifice his life. And so this act of foot washing is in the context of his sacrificial death. That's why John mentions the Passover at the very start.

In other words, his service would be sacrificial, but also loving the rest of verse one. Having loved his own who are in the world, he loved them to the end. The word end here might refer to the end of his life or to the end of his love. That is the full extent of his love. Either way, the foot washing that took place on Thursday night was not quite the end of his life and hardly the full extent of his love. I mean, it's Michelle and my wedding anniversary in two weeks time. And so can you imagine if I just washed her feet and said, happy anniversary, that's the extent of my love, there you go. I think

she'd feel ripped off.

[5:05] But Jesus' death on the cross the next day, well, that is the end of his life until Sunday. And that does show the full extent of his love, doesn't it? And so the point is this foot washing service really pointed to his death for us, which is both sacrificial and loving. In other words, Jesus served us both sacrificially and lovingly and humbly. Verse two to five. The evening meal was in progress.

The devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to portray Jesus. And Jesus knew that the father had put all things under his power, that he'd come from God and was returning to God. And so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, wrapped a towel around his waist. And after that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. Notice verse three, the greatness of Jesus.

The father had given the son power, all power. All things were under his power, it says. He is the king of kings, supreme over life that we saw a couple of weeks ago. I wonder what you would do with such power. We'd like to think we'd use it well, wouldn't we? But what is that saying? You know, power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. I remember the first time Michelle and I left the kids at home. They were old enough to do that. And we said we'd put one of them in charge of all the others, give them absolute power. And one quickly said, put me in charge and gave this evil laugh. So clearly we chose another one. But even as we left the house, we could hear that other one beginning to boss their siblings around. It had gone to their head, but not to Jesus's head.

Knowing he's no ordinary person, that he is from God and returning to God, and knowing that God had put all things under his power. What does he do? Does he then use his power for himself? Verse four, so he got up from the mill and took off the outer clothing of privilege and power and put on the towel of service and washes feet. Feet. Smelly, dusty, dirty, sandal wearing feet. In fact, it was such a filthy job, it was deemed too dirty for even Jewish servants. And so if at all possible, they would get a Gentile, a non-Jewish servant to do it instead. But here is Jesus, the King, with all power, and he does it.

It's an extraordinary act of humility, isn't it? Like we celebrate today on Palm Sunday, when Jesus, the King, rides into Jerusalem, not on a massive chariot or royal carriage or war horse, but on a donkey, a lowly donkey to show his humility. Can you imagine a powerful world leader doing any of this? Trump or Putin or Albanese? Can you imagine King Charles washing the feet of Meghan Markle? But Jesus, the King, does it. He truly is the servant king, isn't he? Which is why he is worth following, because he doesn't ask us to do anything that he doesn't do first for us.

[8:43] Indeed, he even cleanses us so that we can have life with him. Verse 6 to 8, he came to Simon Peter who said to him, Lord, are you going to wash my feet? Jesus replied, you do not realize what I'm doing, but later you will understand. No, said Peter, you shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered, unless I wash you, you have no part with me. Peter rightly calls Jesus Lord for he knows Jesus is King, which usually means we're supposed to serve him, right? Not the King serve us. And so in verse 6, he's horrified that Jesus would come to wash his feet. And in verse 8, he declares that Jesus will never wash his feet. But he's not understood that this foot washing pointed to Jesus' pending death, that would cleanse us and enable us to have a part with him, and to be part of his family, to enjoy life with him, both now and for eternity. You see, it's not having unclean feet that keeps us from being part of God's family and enjoying life with him, is it? It's having unclean hearts from which our sin comes. But Jesus' blood shed on that wooden cross pays for our sins so that we can be forgiven and cleansed, which is why Jesus says in verse 8, unless I wash you, unless I die for you, you can have no part with me, no eternal life with me. And so good old Peter then goes on to the same verse 9, then Lord Simon Peter replied, not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well.

He doesn't quite get it still, does he? But he does get it has something to do with being part of Jesus' family, of having life with him. And so you have to admire his eagerness, don't you? These

days, people have FOMO, it's a fear of missing out. That's what the kids call it, FOMO, of all sorts of things, like petrol. People have a bit starting having a FOMO of petrol, especially diesel. But for Peter, the most important thing that he feared missing out on was life with Jesus. And so he exclaims, not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well. And I wonder if we are that eager, like Peter, to have life with Jesus. That the thought of not having it would fill us with fear.

But Jesus assures him he won't miss out, for he is already clean. Verse 10 and 11, Jesus answered, those who have a bath need only to wash their feet, their whole body is clean. And you are clean, the you is plural there. Though not every one of you, for he knew who was going to betray him. And that is why he said not everyone was clean. Jesus says his disciples, apart from Judas, who would betray him, are already clean. Why? Well, because they have already put their faith in him.

You see, Jesus still needs to wash their feet. That is, he still needs to die for them to pay for their sin. But we are considered right with God, cleansed by God through faith in him. Whether that's before Jesus died on the cross, like those in the Old Testament, or whether that's after Jesus died on the cross, like us here in Melbourne. It's by faith we are cleansed and made right. And so the question for us, firstly, is do we have faith in Jesus, this servant king? Do we believe Jesus really died to cleanse you from sin for life eternal with him? If you want to be cleansed from sin for life with him, then do believe in Jesus. And for us who do, then he leaves us an example to follow. Point to verse 12.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. Do you understand what I've done for you? He asked them. You call me teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I've set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. You see, by washing their feet the Thursday before he died, Jesus not only pointed to his death that would cleanse them, but he also left an example for them to follow. But does that mean we should then literally wash each other's feet over morning tea after the service? I can get up some big bowls if you like. We have a queue and get some towels out. I mean, some churches do this based on verse 14, which I think personally I would find a little bit awkward. The thought of someone touching my feet. Anyway. But that's not what Jesus is getting at. It's a metaphor. He's not saying he wants them to literally wash each other's feet any more than he wants them to die for each other's sins.

[13:59] Rather, this foot washing was a symbol of humble, loving, and sacrificial service. And that's what Jesus wants us to copy in verse 14. Not the symbol, but the principle.

And for Jesus, that meant dying the next day to pay for our sins. That's how he humbly, lovingly, sacrificially serves us. But for us, it looks different, doesn't it?

But the principle is the same. He wants us to humbly, lovingly, sacrificially serve one another as he first served us. That's why I didn't suggest we do some foot washing today.

I'm sorry if you're looking forward to that. But because it is a symbol of service, then we have actually seen it done today as people have served us. Whether it's been by welcoming, whether it's by conversation and encouraging, whether it's by doing the flowers during the week, whether it's by reading the Bibles or leading the service or leading in prayers later, people have washed others' feet by serving us, you see. And all without asking for anything in return. I saw this cartoon once where Jesus says to his disciple, you've been doing a great job serving others, but you've got to stop asking for tips, for money. But you guys don't, which is amazing. In fact, even this morning, we had one member of our 7.45am service, he got out of hospital last Monday and insisted on leading the service for us this morning. Here is loving, sacrificial service. This is what washing each other's feet looks like for us. And so it's encouraging to see people doing that here, not for tips, but humbly, lovingly, sacrificially. This is how we're to wash one another's feet, putting off our privileges and preferences and putting on the towel of service.

But it's all for a purpose. You see, two weeks ago, we saw that life is about the Son, Jesus. For he is the one through whom God creates all life, life in this world and new life with God, both now and the world to come. And so Jesus is all about giving us life, which means our life is meant to be all about him, you know, him being our top priority.

[16:30] But then last week, we saw as a church, that meant where to help everyone see this and live like this. That was God's goal for us. Do you remember from Colossians 1.28? He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and

teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

Or as it says on the front of your bulletins, on the bottom right-hand corner, where it's got our mission, is to go gather and grow in Christ. Present everyone mature in Christ, same thing. So since life is about the Son, then our mission is to present everyone mature in him. And our method is the same, isn't it? You know, it's him we proclaim.

Or on the front of the bulletins, we're to do this by prayerfully proclaiming and promoting God's word about Jesus in love. And so for us who are Christians, membership firstly means praying. For ourselves, yes, and each other, but also for those outside the church. That God would grow us more like Jesus. And for those outside, that he might save them.

[17:42] As we saw last week, Paul says, not only devote yourselves to prayer, but pray for them. Pray for God to open doors for the gospel to go out. That more might be saved.

Our prayer night is this Wednesday night. Membership means we are all to serve by praying. Secondly, membership means, I'm going to go pretty quick through here. You can look up the verses more later and reflect on them.

But it means living lives that please and honour Christ and act like Christ towards outsiders, those outside the church. Again, we saw this last week to remember.

Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders. Wisdom was being like Jesus, that it might prompt some comment or question from them, which verse 6 we can then answer with gracious and seasoned conversation.

That is, graciously answering with appropriately gospel flavour for the situation. Membership means we're all to live lives that honour Christ and act like Christ towards outsiders.

[18:48] Thirdly, membership means serving like the sun by speaking the truth in love to insiders, to one another. Again, we saw this from Colossians last week, where we talked about how we're to let the word of Christ dwell richly among us as we teach one another.

And one way we could do that was by singing songs to God. At the same time, we would hear the words, the truth, and be encouraged. And if, like me, you can't sing, that's okay, thankfully Ephesians also says we can just simply speak the truth in love as well to one another, so that we might help each other grow in maturity.

But it is in love, both in a loving manner and out of love for each other. Membership means we're all to serve by speaking to one another.

It also means playing a part to build the body as we're able. And so Ephesians goes on to say, from him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each member, as each part does its work.

And so we all have a part to play. For some it might be just those first three things, praying, living and speaking, because that's all our health and circumstances enable, and that's okay.

[20:16] But for others, it might mean playing a specific part on our roster or some other way. A way that might either directly proclaim the gospel or support those who do proclaim the gospel or help others hear it so that we might present everyone mature in Christ.

As I said before, many of you already serve like this, which is fantastic. But perhaps some are not yet serving like this and could. And so in your bulletins today, I gave you a serving, a nine o'clock serving sheet.

I ran out of yellow paper, so some might be white. But why not have a think about a part that you could play if you're able? I know not everyone can. That's okay.

But there are lots of parts to play. And Joy reminded me, choir is one other part as well. And so if there is choir, you can put an extra box and put choir. And then just put a smiley face for Joy.

There's a box out next to the offertory box and the listening in Lent forms called serving forms. So you can fill it out over morning tea and drop it in or give it to me later on. But this is what membership means for those who are able, playing a part to help us grow, mature in Christ.

[21:32] But it also means meeting to encourage others as we're able. I know health and holidays mean we can't meet every Sunday or every Bible study. But as the Bible itself says, we're not to give up meeting

together, which means every time church or Bible study is on, then we need to be there as we're able.

Especially since it's about serving others. Notice in Hebrews 10, it doesn't say, let us not give up meeting together as someone had in the habit of doing so that we can come and worship God. Or so that we can be encouraged ourselves.

It doesn't say that, does it? It says so that you can encourage one another. Now, yes, we do worship God as we come to church. And yes, we are encouraged ourselves. But actually, coming to church is about serving others.

And we can't serve one another if we're not meeting with one another. And finally, membership means giving to gospel ministry as we're able. I know petrol prices are ridiculous.

I know the cost of living is increasing. I did the shopping this past week and things have gone up even from last week. I was not happy. And so many don't have much to give, but God doesn't care about the amount.

[22:45] He cares about the heart. A heart that wants to give. And so we're all to give what we decide in our hearts. Not reluctantly, but cheerfully.

For God will use our money to help proclaim Christ, provide for the body of Christ, all so that we might present everyone mature in Christ. The amount will be different as we're able, whether it's 50 cents, \$50, \$500.

Membership means serving by giving as we're able. These ways are all directed to church members in the Bible. These are all in the context of letters to churches.

But that's a lot of things that membership means, isn't it? And some, if not all, are hard to do. And so Jesus finishes with a challenge and encouragement.

Verse 16, Here is the challenge, which is to remember we're not above our master.

[23:53] And so if our king and master served us, then so too must we serve others. It is not an optional extra, you realize. If we think it's optional for us, then we are saying we are above Jesus.

Yes, he served us, but we don't have to serve others. We're above him. That's not right, is it? No servant, no servant is greater than their king and master.

Since he served us to present us mature in him, then we must serve others to help present everyone mature in him. As we're able.

But here's the encouragement, verse 17, Now that you know these things, you'll be blessed if you do them. Serving actually brings blessing, like the blessing of joy and satisfaction.

Yes, sometimes when God prompts our conscience to serve, we might think, Oh, do I really have to do that? But often, after we serve, we feel good about it.

[24:55] Have you ever experienced that? You know, Oh, yes, I should do that. You then do it and serve someone else and actually help someone. And you feel good about it. You feel joy and satisfaction, don't you?

Here is one blessing. Not to mention the blessing of storing up treasure in heaven. Serving actually brings blessing. I don't know if you're into bucket lists or not, but on the last day of his life, Jesus washed feet to show he would humbly, lovingly, sacrificially serve us at the cross.

And so we are to serve like him, our servant king. In other words, membership means serving like the son. So let's pray we would.

Let's pray. Our gracious father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus who served us by humbly, lovingly, and sacrificially dying for us.

And so help us, we pray, given he first served us, to serve others, both humbly, lovingly, and sacrificially too, that you might use our service to present everyone mature in him.

[26:12] We ask it in his name. Amen. Amen.