

'Membership's About ...'

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0:00] I'm guessing you've all heard of bucket lists before. It's things people want to do before they kick the proverbial bucket.! Although if you did that, you might be taken somewhere.

Or this one, go to a pet store aquarium with a fishing rod and see what they do. But here's the thing. Jesus has less than one day to live.

And you know what he did? He washed feet. Can you believe that? Yes, he also ate his last meal. He taught his disciples and he went out and prayed.

But first he washed feet. Can you imagine that being on anyone's bucket list? Well, today we're looking at what church membership means. And if you're visiting today, as Fiona said, you kind of joined us in the middle of a series.

And we're thinking, as I said today, about what it means to be members of a church. And before you all start taking off your shoes and socks to have your feet washed, that's not quite the point that Jesus was making in our reading today.

[1:24] Rather, it was about serving others because he first served us. After all, it was servants who washed people's feet in the ancient world, wasn't it?

And so membership is about serving like the sun. That's the big idea. Membership is about serving like the sun. We're going to look about how he serves from John 13.

We'll think about different ways to serve as part of this series. And then we'll come back with a challenge and an encouragement to serve at the end. But firstly, point one, verse one, how he serves.

It was just before the Passover festival, Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and to go to the Father. Now, the year Jesus died on the cross, that year the Passover fell on a Thursday night.

It began the evening of Thursday right through to that very first evening of Good Friday. And so for us, that's Thursday this week that these events originally took place.

[2:30] And we heard in our first reading that this Passover festival, this Passover meal was to remind them how they were once slaves in Egypt. And after God giving Egypt lots and lots of warnings, God would then judge Egypt to force them to let his people go.

But Israel was still in Egypt. And so a lamb, a Passover lamb was sacrificed. It's blood put on the wooden door frame so God would see the blood and pass over that Israelite house.

Well, earlier in John's Gospel, when John saw Jesus, he said, look, there is the lamb, the Passover lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

And by take away the sin of the world, it means take away the judgment the world deserves because of sin and that we actually deserve because of our sin.

And Jesus would do this by sacrificing himself as that Passover lamb where his blood would be put not on a wooden door frame, but on a wooden cross.

[3:33] That's what it means when it says in verse 1, the hour had come for him to leave this world. It was time for him to sacrifice his life, to take our punishment in our place and then return to the Father.

And so this act of foot washing that's in the rest of the passage actually pointed to his sacrificial death. And reminds us that his service to us was sacrificial.

But also loving because verse 1 goes on to say, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The word end here can mean to the end of his life or it can mean to the end

of his love.

That is the full extent of his love. But either way, this foot washing in our passage that took place on the Thursday night was not quite the end of his life. And it's hardly the full extent of his love.

I mean, in two weeks' time, it's Michelle and my wedding anniversary. And if I washed Michelle's feet and said, happy anniversary, that's the extent of my love, there you go. I don't think that would go down well. I think she'd feel ripped off.

[4:44] But Jesus' death on the cross that next day, well, that is the end of his life until Easter Sunday. And that does show the full extent of his love.

The point is, this foot washing service again pointed to his death for us, which is both sacrificial as the Passover lamb and loving.

In other words, Jesus served us both sacrificially and lovingly, but also humbly. Verse 2 to 5. That evening meal was in progress and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God. So he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, wrapped a towel around his waist.

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 in verse 3, the power that Jesus had.

[5:45] The Father had given his son, put all things under his power. In other words, given his son all power over everything. Jesus really is the king of kings, supreme over life, as we saw a couple of weeks ago.

I wonder what you would do with such power. I think we'd all like to think we would use that well. I mean, we'd like to think that, wouldn't we? But what's that saying? You know, power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

I remember one of the first times we left our kids at home when they're old enough. We said we'd put one of them in charge. You know, give them absolute power. One of them very quickly said, put me in charge, and then gave this evil kind of laugh.

We clearly put someone else in charge instead. But even as we left the house, we could hear the one we did put in charge beginning to boss the others around before we'd even left the house. But the power does not go to Jesus' head.

Even though he knows he's no ordinary person, even though he knows he's from God and returning to God, even though he knows that all things have been put under his power by God, what does he do in verse 4?

[6:55] Does he then exert power for himself? Verse 4, no. So he got up from the mill, took off his outer clothing, like taking off his privilege, and wrapped a towel of service around his waist and began to wash his disciples' feet.

Smelly, dusty, sandal-wearing feet. In fact, it was such a filthy job that in the ancient world it was deemed too dirty a job for Jewish servants so that they would get Gentile, that is, non-Jewish servants, to do it instead if they could.

But here the king, Jesus the king does it. It's an extraordinary act of humility, isn't it? Like we celebrate today on Palm Sunday, when the king rides in, not in a chariot, but on a lowly donkey. Can you imagine a powerful world leader doing this? Trump or Putin or Albanese? Can you imagine King Charles washing the feet of Meghan Markle? But Jesus the king does this.

He truly is the servant king, isn't he? Which is why it's worth following him. Because he doesn't ask us to do anything that he doesn't do first for us.

[8:16] Indeed, he even cleanses us so that we can have life with him. Do you see 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 now what I am 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 because he knows Jesus is God's appointed king, which usually means you're supposed to serve him, not him serve you.

And so in verse 6, he's horrified at the thought that Jesus might wash his feet. And in verse 8, he declares that Jesus will never wash his feet. But he's not understood that this feet washing pointed to Jesus' dying for them.

That would cleanse us and enable us to have part with Jesus. And to be part of his family and enjoy life with him. That life now in this world with all the help and blessings that come with it.

And life eternal in the world to come. You see, it's not having unclean feet that keeps us from being part of his family and enjoying life with him.

[9:33] It's having unclean hearts that sin, isn't it? But Jesus' blood shed on that wooden cross pays for our sin so that we can be forgiven and cleansed.

Which is why in verse 8, he says, Unless I wash you, unless I die for you, you can have no part with me. No life eternal with me.

And so good old Peter, then kind of sensing something, says, Then Lord, 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. It has something to do with being part of his family and having life with him. And so you've got to admire his eagerness, don't you? These days people have FOMO, you know, fear of missing out of all sorts of things.

Like petrol, especially diesel. But for Peter, the most important thing, the thing that he's scared of missing out on is life with Jesus.

[10:37] And so he says, well, then wash everything. And I wonder if we're that eager, like Peter. Whether being part of his Christ family, having life with him is that important to us.

Such that we would fear missing out on it. Jesus assures him that he won't. For he's already clean. Verse 10. Jesus answered, those who have had a bath need only wash their feet.

Their whole body is clean. And you are clean. Though not every one of you. For he knew he was going to betray him. And that is why he said not every one of you was clean. Jesus says his disciples, apart from Judas, who was about to betray him, are already clean.

Why? Well, because they already believe in him. Yes, Jesus still needs to wash their feet. That is to die for them. But we are considered right with God.

Cleansed by God through faith. Belief in him. Whether that's before Jesus dies on the cross, like those in the Old Testament.

[11:45] Or whether that's after Jesus dies on the cross, like us here in Melbourne. It's a bit like, what is it, after pay? Where you buy something now and pay for it later?

We can be made clean. Well, these disciples were made clean and then Jesus would pay for it later the next day. But the question is, do you have faith in him, our servant king?

Do you believe Jesus is real and really died to cleanse us from sin for life eternal with him? If you want to be cleansed from sin for life with him, then do believe in him.

For us who do, then Jesus leaves us an example to follow. Point 2, verse 12. See, by washing their feet on the Thursday night before he died, Jesus not only pointed to his death that would cleanse them, but also left an example for them and for us to follow.

But does that mean then we should all literally wash each other's feet after our service today?

We're going down to Ruffey Lake Park for a picnic. There's a little river there. I can bring some towels down. We can have a line. No, I don't think that's what Jesus was getting at.

[13:25] He's not saying he wants them to literally wash each other's feet any more than he wants them to literally die for each other's sins.

Rather, it's a symbol of humble, loving and sacrificial service.

And that's what Jesus wants us to copy in verse 14. It's a metaphor for that kind of service. He wants us to copy not the symbol, but the principle. Now, for Jesus, that meant dying the next day to pay for our sins, but for us, it obviously looks different.

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

I'm sorry if you were hoping to volunteer for that. Because it is just a symbol. And yet, because it is a symbol of service, then we have actually seen it done today. As people have served us, whether that's welcoming us as we've come in, whether that's serving us by looking after our kids out in kids'

church or in creche, whether that's doing the sound and slides at the back, whether it's leading in the band or the music or leading the service or reading the Bible, whatever it is, there's your foot washing.

And they've been doing it all without asking for anything in return. I saw this dad joke cartoon where Jesus says to one of his disciples, you've been doing a good job serving others, but you've got to stop asking for tips.

[14:55] But you guys don't, which is great. In fact, one of our members from our early morning 7.45am service, he got out of hospital last Monday and insisted on leading the service for us today.

There's your humble, loving, sacrificial foot washing. And so it is so encouraging to see people serving like that here, whether it's up the front or behind the scenes.

Putting off our privileges and preferences and putting on that towel of service. But it's all for a purpose, right?

You see, two weeks ago we saw that life's about the son Jesus because it's through Jesus God created this world. It gave us life in this world. And it's through Jesus that God gives us new life with him, both in this world and the one to come.

Jesus is all about giving us life. And so our life is to be all about him, you know, where he's our top priority. Which meant last week as a church, we're to help everyone see this and live like this.

[16:02] That was God's goal for us. So we saw from Colossians 1.28 that we are to proclaim Jesus, modelling and teaching everyone, so that we may present everyone fully mature in him.

That's why on the front of your bulletins, down the bottom right-hand corner, our mission statement is to go, gather, and grow in Christ, which is about presenting everyone mature in Christ.

And the method is the same as that verse on the screen. It's by proclaiming him. So underneath on your bulletins at the front, it says, by prayerfully proclaiming and promoting God's word, the message about Jesus in love.

And this is what we're to be on about as church members. And so to kind of break it down into different parts, for us who are Christians, then membership will firstly mean serving like the son, by praying, whether that's for ourselves or those inside the church or those outside the church.

We saw this last week. So we'd heard from Colossians how Paul says, and pray for us too, that God may open a door for our message so that people might hear the good news and be saved.

[17:18] Our prayer night is coming up this Wednesday night. Membership means we're all to serve by praying. It also means we're to serve by living, living lives that honor Christ and act like Christ towards outsiders.

Again, we saw this last week, so I'm going to keep moving very quickly. And remember, be wise in the way you act towards outsiders. Wisdom in Colossians about being like Jesus, doing good, loving people, which might provoke a comment or a question from them that we can then answer with grace, appropriately flavored with the gospel for the situation, pointing them to Jesus.

These opportunities will vary depending on our situations, but either way, membership means we're all to serve by living lives that honor Christ and act like Christ towards outsiders. It also means speaking the truth in love to build up insiders in the church.

Again, we saw this last week, so again, briefly to remind you, we saw how we're to let the message of Christ dwell richly amongst us here each Sunday, and where we can actually teach and admonish one another.

And one way we can do that is through singing songs. And I confess that I can't sing, but we can still do that in a crowd. I kind of cover it up down there. But Ephesians also says we can simply speak the truth in love as well, so that we might help each other grow, mature in Christ.

[18:48] And so, we're to do this though, remember, 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 and by playing a part to build the body as we're able. And so that verse in Ephesians, which we didn't look at last week, it goes on to say in verse 16, from him, from Christ, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part, each member, does its work.

And so each one of us in this room and the cry room and outside, we all have a part to play in helping present one another mature in Christ. For some, it might mean just those first three things, you know, praying, living and speaking because we can all do those things regardless of our health or circumstances.

But for others, it might mean playing a specific part on a roster or something else that either directly proclaims the good news of Jesus or supports others who do or enables others to hear it.

As I said before, many of you already serve like this, which is fantastic. But perhaps there's some here who are not serving like this, but could. Well, you can.

[20:17] And that's why when you came in today, hopefully you would receive one of these green serving forms or serving sheets, which gives you lots of different parts you can play if you're able to. I'll give you a chance, hopefully, later to fill that out.

And there's a box out there you can put it in if you'd like to so that together we can build the body of Christ and present everyone mature in Christ. Membership means serving by playing a part as we're able.

It also means meeting to encourage others as we're able. So I know health and holidays mean we can't meet every Sunday or every Bible study group, but the Bible does say that we're not to give up meeting together, but to meet to encourage one another.

And so every time church is on and we're able to come, then we should actually come because it's part of serving others. Notice it says there not to give up meeting together so we can come and worship God.

No, it doesn't say that. So that we can come and be encouraged ourselves. No, it doesn't say that. It says we come and meet together to encourage others.

[21:29] One of the reasons we need to keep coming to church is not for God, not for you, but for each other as we're able. And finally, membership means serving like the sun by giving to gospel ministry as we're able.

I know, as I said, petrol prices are ridiculous. The cost of living is increasing. When I did the shopping this past week, I noticed lots of things had gone up even from the previous week. I was a bit grumpy at the checkout actually.

And so many don't have much to give. But you know what? God doesn't care about the amount. He cares about our heart. A heart that wants to give no matter the amount.

As it says in the Bible, each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give. But not reluctantly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver.

For God will use our money to help proclaim the good news of Jesus, to provide for the body of Christ so that again, you might be able to work together and present everyone mature in Him. The amount will be different whether it's 50 cents, \$50, \$500, whatever.

[22:44] God doesn't care about the amount. He cares about the heart. And so membership means serving by giving as we're able. Now all these ways are directed to church members in Paul's letters.

They each come from a letter written to a church. And so this applies to all church members. But it's a long list, isn't it? And some, if not all, are hard to do.

And so Jesus finishes with a challenge and encouragement. Verse 16, He says, Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Here's the challenge, which is to remember that we are not above Jesus.

If our king and master served us, then we must serve others. It is not actually an optional extra, you realize. If we think it's optional for us, then we are saying we are above Jesus.

We are better than him. We don't need to serve others, even though he served us. No servant is greater than their king, since he served us to present us mature in him, then we must serve others.

[23:54] And we can, whether it's simply praying or turning up to encourage. But the encouragement in verse 17 is, now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

Serving actually brings blessing. And I think if we reflect, we know that ourselves. I mean, have you ever had that experience where, you know, God prompts your conscience to do something and you kind of think, oh, do I really have to?

And then after you do it, after you serve or help someone, you actually feel good about it? Have you had that experience? Serving actually brings the blessing of joy and satisfaction. Not to mention the blessing of storing treasure in heaven.

The point is, 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, and sacrificially serve us at the cross.

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

[25:03] Pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we thank you for Jesus who came humbly to this world to serve us first by lovingly, humbly, sacrificially dying for us on a cross.

And so, help us, we pray, in some sort of way to serve others with that same attitude of humility, love, and sacrificial nature.

Help us to do this, we pray, so that you might use us to present everyone we can mature in him. We ask it for his sake. Amen.