

Requiescat in Pace – John Phillip Hinkleman, Sr.

Micah 4:1-5

2 Timothy 4:1-8

John 13:1-17

Why did Jesus wash His disciples' feet? The twelve were dumbfounded by the gesture. I can imagine that Peter thought: "whoa, whoa, whoa – this whole thing is backwards. I should be washing *your* feet." Jesus Himself said that He was providing them an example. "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:14). It wasn't a super pleasant job. Typically, this job was designated for the lowest servant in a household. That's because no one wanted to do it. Jesus willingly takes the lowest spot and He serves. It's natural for Him. He doesn't wince or groan or hold His nose – He gives of Himself, He serves naturally. But why this? He was going to die the next day. He knew it. The lowest spot would be a cross outside of Jerusalem. The lowest spot would be bearing all of humanity's sin. The lowest spot would be suffering the Father's wrath against sin – all alone, all by Himself in the lowest spot that this world has ever known.

Why'd He do it? Why did Jesus wash His disciples' feet? St. John says that it was to show them the full extent of His love. It can also be translated as showing them His love to the very end or showing them the perfectness of His love. Can you imagine having your cruddy feet washed by the King of Creation, the Author of Life? Why'd Jesus do it? Was it really about feet? Those ole boys, I suspect that they were uncomfortable at first. There was something else going on in this priceless act. I've been thinking about John Hinkleman an awful lot lately. I've got a lot of great memories. I've heard a lot of great stories. John was an organizational savant for his family. John was "AJ-Squared-Away" (as we say in the Navy), a tireless devotee to his family's active schedule. Just don't let him cook. Oh, he could grill a hot dog, but anything more complex was not going to be a five star experience for whoever ate it. It's true, taking care of his family was John's self-understood purpose. But at his core, in the very fabric of his being, John was a teacher.

I've read the stories, tributes from his students. John was in his element in his classroom. The subject matter varied but history was his wheelhouse for sure. His command of the material, his authentic passion for the human story, the human narrative – all that left a mark on his students. But there was something more going on that was deep in John's character and not just at Kolb Jr. High but wherever he went, whoever he encountered. What was in John's character? Dignity. I don't know this for sure but I have a super strong suspicion – we can talk about it afterwards if you disagree – you have to have dignity before you can convey it. To treat someone with dignity; what does that mean? Was John actually able to provide dignity to those he taught, those he interacted with? How does one do that? Have you ever lost your dignity? I'm pretty sure that everyone in this holy house has felt low, forgotten or worthless – all of us for different reasons. Sometimes it's a self-inflicted loss, sometimes others cruelly abuse us but dignity is fragile. Just so we're clear, dignity is defined as "the state or quality of being worthy of honor or respect."

Did Jesus run across people who had lost their dignity? How about a leper? Do you suppose that a leper loses their dignity? How about tax collectors and prostitutes? How about the demon

possessed or the paralyzed. Back to my idea that one has to have dignity in order to convey it, in order to give it. Did Jesus have dignity? How did Jesus treat the lowly, the seemingly forgotten and marginalized? He touched them, didn't He? He washed their feet, didn't He? The Lord Christ gave what He had to give, gave of Himself, gave to lift people from their battles with worthlessness. Sin robs us of dignity. There's no two ways about it. Lust and greed and pride and a lack of self-control – that junk is in the human heart, that crud is in the fallen and corrupt flesh of man. You've lost plenty of battles with sin. It's not a great feeling, is it? Jesus came to take away sin. Jesus came to reveal the Father, to defeat death, to open the Kingdom of heaven. Jesus came to die and rise again. All that is true; Jesus came to give us dignity. Do you believe that?

When Adam and Eve fell in the garden, humanity lost their God-given dignity and Christ came to restore it. Do you believe that? The Bible says that “we love because [God] first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Okay, so let's replace love with dignity and call to mind the character of John Hinkleman. You can't convey what you don't have. We all know it, we all felt it – John had and gave to others dignity. He respected you. You could tell by the way he looked you in the eye. He conveyed dignity to his family with those priceless words, repeated over and over – I... love... you. When you're low and someone treats you as though you are valuable, priceless, worth their time and energy, what does that do to you? If you don't have it you can't give it. Where did John's dignity come from? John knew that Jesus had washed his feet. The Lord was called “Teacher,” “Rabbi.” Jesus taught John. John received from the Lord what you received from John. I'm a firm believer in the ripple effect. How many people did John impact with the dignity that they received from him who then went out and did the same to others? All that can be traced back to Christ. John was the clay and the Son of God who washed His disciples' feet was the Potter. The Lord made John a teacher of something way more than history.

Death isn't always so great. Getting old is sometimes less than a picnic. John's body and his mind suffered some troubling things. People who work in nursing homes, memory care, hospice nurses – those folks are usually the cream of the crop when it comes to compassion, empathy. The folks over at Brightwater are no exception. Their work is usually arduous. Residents, patients run the gamut in regard to personal affability. Some are sweet and some are cantankerous jerk-faces. Good nurses soldier on regardless of the temperament of the patient. To be sure, the nurses over at Brightwater memory care blessed John. But you can ask them because they told Lorrie, they told me; John blessed them. John “dignified” them. You see, the gift in John's character wasn't seasonal or dependent upon his mood. It was stationary. John knew that he was a sinner. John had the humility to know, the biblically formed faith to know that He was saved by grace. John was loved by God even when he was dead in trespasses and sins. That faith dignified John's character and it led him to bless those around him, including the nurse staff who helped him die. That is exactly what faith does; that is exactly what Christians do; that is exactly what John did.

I hate to tell you this, but you're going to suffer in this life. Your dignity might be like the stock market in 2008 (not so good, a downward trajectory). Again, sometimes its self-inflicted, sometimes it's demonic, sometimes our loss of dignity is just emptiness, faithlessness, spiritual poverty. But do you know what gives us dignity, every single one of us; do you know what lifts us above the vanity of this broken creation and our own selfish nature? The Resurrection of

Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was dead and now He lives forever. One Sunday morning, two thousand years ago, the Son of God burst the bonds of death and rose victorious. He lives, the victory's won. The Resurrection gives us dignity. Our sins are paid for, death has no sting and heaven is our home. The dignity that John carried in this life he now has in full. Christ's righteousness, His eternal love and the power of His resurrection are in John's possession. Faith has reached its goal and John is a part of the church triumphant. Christ dignifies the lowly by His blood. Christ has brought John home. On this day, in this place and when you leave, the dignity of Christ the King surrounds you.