

John 13:1-17
Unless I wash you
Tim Anderson 18/2/2018

Gina Rinehart is Australia's richest woman.
She inherited from her father Lang Hancock
very significant wealth in the form of mines and mining leases in WA.
And she has managed it very astutely herself,
to the point where she is the eighth richest woman in the world.
What would you do with all that money?
What would you do with all of the power and influence
that comes from being so immensely wealthy?
What could you do to make the world a better place?
Well in Gina's case,
what she has done is to fight her children in the courts for years
over who should control the family trust.
She has used her power to try to hold on to power -
not even wanting to look after her own children.

There is a different way.
Jesus shows us that way.
In verse 3, John tells us,
"Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power,
and that he had come from God and was returning to God."
Being Australia's richest person,
the eighth richest woman in the world is a position of power -
no doubt about that.
But Jesus is in a different class altogether.
The Father had put all things under his power.
So much so that he will personally decide
how Gina Rinehart spends eternity.
So what does Jesus do with his power?

"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,
and wrapped a towel around his waist.
After that, he poured water into a basin
and began to wash his disciples' feet.

Do you see how John makes a connection
between Jesus unrivalled power and authority
and his washing his disciples' feet?

Immense, unrivalled power
so he engaged in humble menial service.

Jesus was powerful, so he served.

It's not just Jesus was powerful
and isn't it incredible that he served?

It's Jesus was powerful
and that was the reason he served.

Why is power a reason for service?

I guess because if you are powerful,
you are secure in your identity.

You aren't worried about what people think of you,
because you know who you are.

Jesus knew he came from God the Father.

He knew he was going to God the Father.

And so he is completely unthreatened
by taking on the role of a servant.

It says that Jesus took off his outer clothing to wash his disciples feet.

Why did he do that?

Was he worried about getting his clothes wet?

Did he want to show off his ripped abs and bulging biceps?

No.

It was because that was the customary dress of a slave.

Slaves wore only underclothes,

because who had money to waste buying them proper clothes?

So Jesus dressed like a slave and washed his disciples' feet.

Well he gets to Peter.
And Peter says,
"Uh, Uh, This is most inappropriate.
I'm the one who ought to be washing your feet.
You are the master.
I am the slave.
I'm just not sure I can cope with this Jesus.
No. Let's not go here."
And Jesus answered,
"Unless I wash you,
you have no part with me."
And those are tremendously important words.
"Unless I wash you,
you have no part with me."
You see, Jesus is going to go on
and tell his disciples to copy his example.
And that's the part of the story we all know and expect.
Jesus was a humble servant,
so you go and be a humble servant too.
But this part is separate to that.
And this part has to come first.
"Unless I wash you,
you have no part with me."

There's actually a great danger in the message,
"Jesus was a humble servant,
so you go and be a humble servant too."
It would be very easy to think
the measure of Christian faith is how well you serve.
So if you are serving really well,
you will be acceptable to God
because of how good a servant you are.
That's salvation by works.
All it does is to make people self righteous and proud.
When we serve,
it must not come from a heart that is trying to earn God's favour.

When we serve,
it must come from a grateful response
to what God has done for us in Christ.
And so Jesus says to Peter,
"Unless I wash you,
you have no part with me."

Were Peter's feet really so smelly,
that if Jesus could wash them
he would drop Peter from the team?
Not at all.
It was nothing to do with Peter's feet.
The point was that Peter must allow Jesus to serve him.
Jesus must serve you
before you can be released to serve others.
The washing of Peter's feet
is a sign of the good news of the gospel.
Jesus is about to go to the cross.
That is how Jesus is going to wash Peter.
He will wash him clean with his blood.
Every impurity in Peter will be cleansed.
And only then will Peter be able to serve others.

The same is absolutely true for you.
Unless Jesus washes you,
you have no part with him.
Imagine you were knocking on the pearly gates of heaven.
And Peter came to gate and said to you,
"Why should I let you in?"
What would you say?
Would you say,
I have been a faithful servant of the Lord Jesus?
I have faithfully helped in the Holy Trinity Op Shop for a decade.
I've washed the dishes after morning tea at church.
I've mowed the church lawns.
I've led a group at KYB.

I've run a youth group at church.
I never skip Sunday services.
Those are all good things to do.
But none of them will prompt Peter to open the gate of heaven.
The only answer is,
"Jesus has made me clean.
He is the one who has purified me so I'm fit for heaven.
He has washed me."
That is the basis of our salvation.
Jesus has washed me.
Because
"Unless I wash you,
you have no part with me."

But once Jesus has washed us,
then he has work for us to do.
Jesus says,
"You call me 'teacher' and 'Lord'
and rightly so, for that is what I am."
When Jesus adopted the dress of a slave
to wash his disciples' feet,
he was not renouncing his identity.
He was still their teacher.
Still the one who spoke words of eternal life to them.
He was still their Lord.
Still the one who has been given all authority from the Father.
And as their Lord,
he has work for them to do.
As our Lord,
work for us to do.

"Now that I your Lord and Teacher,
have washed your feet,
you also should wash one another's feet."

Pope Francis was elected

as leader of the Roman Catholic Church in 2013.
One of the signature moments of his papacy
has been his fondness for washing feet.
He takes Jesus' injunction here quite literally,
and on the Thursday prior to Easter
has made a habit of washing people's feet.
On the first year, he went to a children's prison.
And since then,
he has been to an asylum seekers centre
and washed the feet of refugees,
and to a maximum security prison
and washed the feet of former members of the mafia.
Now it's not that no one has ever washed feet before.
But it's quite a different thing
washing the feet of a bunch of cardinals in St Peter's Basilica
than washing the feet of a bunch of prisoners
in a maximum security prison.

What did Jesus actually want his disciples to do?
He said,
"Now that I your Lord and Teacher,
have washed your feet,
you also should wash one another's feet."
I don't think Jesus was seriously interested
in the foot cleanliness of his followers.
He was interested in instilling a culture of humble service.
The more humble, the better.
But not in some sort of competition
as a new way of earning brownie points.
But as a grateful response to Jesus great act of service,
his sacrificial death.

So how do we evaluate the actions of Pope Francis?
Well if you go and wash the feet
of a bunch of Cardinals in St Peter's Basilica,
what does that say?

This may be a trifle ungenerous,
but the message that I'm getting is,
"I'm like Jesus.

These guys are like the disciples.

And we are doing this,

so that everyone else can know,

that I'm like Jesus and these guys are like the disciples."

I'm not sure that is exactly the right message.

It's not conveying humble service to me.

But if you do it like Pope Francis,

and go and wash the feet of a bunch of prisoners or refugees,

then I'm definitely getting the message,

this is about humble service,

and I'm not restricting who it is that I am to serve.

Of course it is a symbolic action.

I think Jesus did the symbolic action to his disciples

in order to encourage them in the direction of real action.

Serving people in the ways that they most need to be served.

I'm pretty sure that there are showers

in the maximum security prisons in Italy,

so the prisoners didn't need their feet washed.

But that's not to say Pope Francis was doing the wrong thing

by a symbolic action.

As the leader of large organisation,

symbolic actions can be powerful ways of guiding your flock.

But for us,

Jesus was about encouraging us towards humble service.

Humble service of others in the way that they really need it.

And not to consider what it might mean for our standing

to engage in that service.

I'm not sure about you,

but when I hear that,

I'm comfortable with the message.

I'm very happy to serve people.

But I often feel quite lost to know what to actually do.
Jesus has washed me,
so I should serve other people.
That's great.
But how exactly should I serve them?

Maybe that's one of the beautiful things about a symbolic action.
It gives us the freedom to inject it with meaning ourselves.
Some members of our church serve the sailors
through the mission to seafarers.
Some members are going to be serving children at Hastings Primary
through Kids' Hope.
Some member clean up the grotty mess that people leave
who use the Op Shop donation bins as rubbish bins.
Some members give their grandchildren a place to live
when it doesn't work out for them at home.
Some members take the basket of donations
to Westernport Community Support.
Some have cooked breakfast for students at the High School.
Others cook breakfast for church members at a men's breakfast.
Some serve families by running a playgroup.
Are you getting the picture that there are many ways to serve?

Jesus is telling you that he has served you,
so you also should serve one another.
But he gives you the freedom to find your own avenue of service.

And there is a promise attached.
Jesus says,
"Now that you know these things.
You will be blessed if you do them."
It's not enough to know that you need to serve one another,
you actually need to do it.
Sometimes we think that if we know the right thing to do,
that is enough.
It reminds me of when I was at Ridley studying to become a minister.

Back in the day,
when you were writing an essay,
you used to have to photocopy articles and chapters of books,
to read for your essay.

And there was this strange psychological phenomenon
where you could feel very virtuous by going to the library
and photocopying lots of relevant articles.

But then as the deadline for handing the essay in approached,
many of the photocopied articles didn't get read,
in the hurry to get something written before the deadline.

What was the benefit in feeling virtuous
by photocopying an article that never got read?

No benefit at all.

Jesus says,

"Now that you know these things,
you will be blessed if you do them."

How will we be blessed in humbly serving one another?

The first blessing is in training our character to be more Christ like.

We grow in Christ like character by practice.

We don't grow in Christ like character by knowing what to do.

We grow by putting it into practice.

How is it that you get church members

who are far more godly than the ministers who preach to them?

It's because the ministers don't put into practice their own sermons
as much the church members.

Note to self -

listen to your own sermons and put them into practice!

How will we be blessed in humbly serving each other?

The second blessing is the privilege
of living as part of a Christ like community.

Who would like to live as part of a community
where the members humbly served one another?

Everyone would.

Well one blessing of creating a community like that

is that you get to live in it.

The third blessing is in seeing the affect of your humble service.
Back to Pope Francis for a second.

Last year he washed the feet
of prisoners in a maximum security facility.
One of the prisoners was a muslim.
Later in the year,
that prisoner was baptised as a Christian.
I don't think it's drawing too long a bow
to suggest that the Pope's action might have triggered the change.

It happens quite often
that acts of humble service change people's hearts.
Hearts that were hardened become more responsive.
And what a blessing it is to see that change.
There's nothing that brings more joy
than seeing a positive change in someone's life
and knowing that in God's kindness,
they responded to some act of your service.

Let me summarise the message of this passage
in two verses.

"Unless I wash you,
you have no part with me."
We must start by being served by Jesus.
Being washed in the blood of Jesus
is where the Christian life begins.
And out of that cleansing,
we are freed to serve others.

Here's the second verse.

"Now that I your Lord and teacher have washed your feet,
you also should wash one another's feet."
Everyone who follows Jesus will want to serve others
as a grateful response to Jesus' love.
You have the freedom to decide what shape that service will take.

And you have the promise
that you will experience God's blessing in your service.