

"He that Is Greatest Among You" 11.4

Scripture Lesson:-

Text:- "He....took a towel": John 13:4.

Introduction:- You have observed, perhaps, that when our Lord "took" a thing, however little, or slight or undramatic it was, he did something big and meaningful with it. Luke tells us that he "took the loaves". You know what followed: the feeding of the five thousand. Matthew tells us that he "took a little child". You know the result: he set the child in the midst of them and gave them a rebuking object lesson on humble-mindedness. Matthew also tells us that he "took the cup". You are aware of the effect: that cup became for all time the sacrificial emblem of his own blood which was shed "for us and for our salvation."

But it is left for John to tell us that our Lord "took a towel and tied it around him" after the manner of a household slave. Pouring water into a basin, he proceeded to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel which he had put around him. Let us look at that towel and think of the immortality which Christ's act conferred upon it.

I.

Observe, to begin with, that he "took a towel" and thereby revealed the humility of service. A lovely deed is often enhanced by the unloveliness of its setting. This was true of our Lord's act of bathing his disciples' feet. Would you believe that the quiet sanctities of that supper room were marred by a noisy dispute which had its roots in their conceit. "And there was also strife among them, which should be accounted the greatest." (Luke 22:24)

But look! The Master, saying not a word, rises, removes his seamless robe, wraps a towel around him, pours water into a basin, and, kneeling before first one and then another of the speechless men, cleanses their dust-laden feet.

Little men can't afford to stoop; greatness does it with naturalness, with ease. In the verse that pre-

cedes our text John makes a remarkable statement: "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God and went to God; he rises from supper, and laid aside his garments." Knowing full well that the scepter of universal sovereignty was his to hold, he chose instead, a towel. Knowing full well that he was to be served by men, he chose instead to become the servant of men. That is humility.

In that supper room where the matchless Servant, towel girded, walks and kneels you have the incarnation is miniature.

Think of the things Jesus might have taken that day. He might have taken a sword. He might have taken a scepter. He might have taken an army. He might have taken a legion of angels. Men drunk with power and consumed with ambition would have been glad to call these agencies into alliance with themselves. Jesus ignored them all. The greatness he embodied had need of none of these. Things as simple as towels and basins and sandals were all he needed to perform a service that would outlast and outdazzle the empty splendors of a Caesar.

If we are to be quite honest about it, we shall have to confess that too frequently we are victims of the false notion that a service worthy of the name must have something big or dramatic. If the thing to be done seems small and the tool for doing it it seems commonplace, we pass it by, dreaming of something more exciting. There is our failure.

God still says to Moses, "What is that in thine hand? When Moses gives God his shepherd's rod, some thrilling things begin to happen.

God still says to an unpromising David, "What is that in thine hand?" When that shepherd's sling is handed over to God, it will not be long until some giants will be falling.

God still says to many a Dorcas, "What is that in thine hand?" When Dorcas's needle is presented to the Lord, cold bodies are warmed and lonely hearts

are cheered. If you cannot do a big thing, smaller thing.

(out)
A lady was filling a missionary box for Burma. A child brought her a penny. Rather than send the coin as a gift, she bought a tract and put it in the box. The tract eventually fell into the hands of a Burmese chief. It led to his conversion. He began telling the story of Christ among members of his tribe. In time more than fifteen hundred of those Burmese savages were converted to Jesus Christ. What did the little child do to start so glorious a chain of spiritual blessing: She simply took a towel, her penny.

II.

Finally, "He took a towel" and thereby emphasized the practicality of service.

When Jesus had finished his ministry of love and grace, and had put on once more his seamless robe, he said quietly, "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye do these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (Vs 15-17)

Service is not the most important thing in the Christian life; but service is the most practical thing about the Christian experience.

You see it is in this area of service that you and I find it most difficult to run a bluff, or put on airs, or fool the people. You may think you are worshipping God when you are only feeling a certain emotional elevation that comes from the rhythm of a hymn or the contagion of a crowd. You and I can get sentimental about a song of consecration in the worship service and be terribly selfish before the Sunday meal is over at home. We can bow our ~~max~~ heads during the prayer hour and look as humble as pilgrims, while inwardly we are as proud as peacocks.

But when it comes to rendering service, the case

is is sharply different. We run smack up against too many practical tests to make any success out of bluff or pretense. We land in the middle of too many situations that look us straight in the eye and say, "Well, what are you going to do about it?" How much time will you devote to it?" How much money will you give to it?"

And when we begin offering our glib and shallow excuses for not doing more, giving more, serving more, we do but reveal the poverty of our souls, the emptiness of our dedication. To condemn our barrenness and to stimulate our usefulness, the Christ, towel girded, stands before us saying, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them".

Conclusion:- The Master speaks to us today. He rebukes us and encourages us. Let us remember how he girded himself and washed his disciples feet, when it was the duty of one of them, to do it. "What is that in thine hand? Why don't you take the towel and go to work?"

God, who touchest earth with beauty,
Make me lovely too,
With thy spirit re-create me,
Make my heart a new.

Like the arching of the heavens,
Lift my thought above;
Turn my dreams to noble action,
Ministries of love.

- Mary S. Edgar