

**“TITLE TO TOWEL”****Pastor Mike Corwin****PALM SUNDAY****TEXT: JOHN 13:1-17****GOD’S WORD: JOHN 12:12-19****I – PUBLIC SERVICE:**

I was promoted to Chief of Police in Bucyrus in May of 1996. One of the very first things I did as the Chief was to schedule a meeting of the entire department the following week. I wanted to lay out my vision and expectations of the department now that it was my turn at the helm. We discussed various issues facing the department and set various goals, but it was what I told them all at the end of the meeting that set the tone and governed their actions for the next 6 years until I retired.

I told them in very plain terms, so there would be no misunderstandings, that they were called “Public Servants.” That meant that they were employed to serve the citizens of the city of Bucyrus. It meant that they worked for the people outside the doors of City Hall. It meant that their wages truly were paid by those people and that I expected them to earn those wages by doing the job they had been entrusted to do. It also meant that they had better treat those citizens like they would any other employer and give them the respect they deserved. They left the meeting knowing that I would stand behind them in all matters but if I received a legitimate citizen’s complaint that they had belittled, abused, ignored, or was rude to one of those citizens I would make sure it didn’t happen again.

I wanted them to know that wearing that uniform and badge was a privilege, not a constitutional right. That they were not entitled to any special treatment other than the gratitude of the citizens and a paycheck for being servants to the community. The motto said “Serve & Protect” and that’s exactly what I expected.

**II – PALM SUNDAY:**

I won’t climb on a soap box this morning but I do want to point out that this attitude of entitlement has gotten us into a world of trouble. Our own government has forgotten they are supposed to be serving us instead of us serving them. Other countries have taken this

entitlement to extremes and formed dictatorships and governments of extermination and oppression. Schools and colleges deal with the issue and the Church of Jesus Christ is being eaten away because of it. Some of our leaders and clergy believe they are entitled to special treatment and standing and forgotten what Jesus taught...that we are to be servants.

I see that lesson taught in the story of this week, the last week of Jesus, called the Passion Week. It begins today with what we call Palm Sunday. Jesus spent Saturday night at the house of his friend Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha. It's during dinner that Mary pours the expensive perfume on his feet and wipes them off with her hair. While this is going on and the dinner is being served the whole town of Bethany is flooded with people who have heard that Jesus is in town and they want to see him. The next day the word that Jesus has left Bethany and is on his way to Jerusalem swept through the city and they're waiting for him as he arrives.

The people have heard all about this Jesus, they have heard of his miracles like raising Lazarus from the dead. They have heard that he is the Messiah, the one prophesized about and they have come to welcome him to the city. They have come out to proclaim him the King of Israel, the one sent by God. They give him a royal welcome by cutting down palm branches and waving them in the air as they shouted Hosanna – Hosanna in the Highest! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, Blessed is the King of Israel.” Jesus rides into the city to begin his final week with a title. He is called the King.

### **III – TEXT – JOHN 13:1-17:**

But that title did not last long. Listen to what happens a few days later...

#### **John 13:1-17 (NLT)**

<sup>1</sup>Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end. <sup>2</sup>It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. <sup>3</sup>Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. <sup>4</sup>So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, <sup>5</sup>and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him. <sup>6</sup>When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" <sup>7</sup>Jesus replied, "You don't understand now what I am doing, but someday you will." <sup>8</sup>"No," Peter protested, "you will never ever wash my feet!" Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me." <sup>9</sup>Simon Peter exclaimed, "Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!" <sup>10</sup>Jesus replied, "A person who has bathed all over does not need to

wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not all of you.”<sup>11</sup> For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, “Not all of you are clean.”<sup>12</sup> After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, “Do you understand what I was doing?”<sup>13</sup> You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you are right, because that’s what I am.<sup>14</sup> And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet.<sup>15</sup> I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.<sup>16</sup> I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message.<sup>17</sup> Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.

His time has arrived...his hour has come. He is mere hours away from facing his death to save us all from it. But he has at least one more important lesson to teach his disciples...that of humble service.

They have gathered to eat the Passover meal together and Jesus has arranged to be alone with them during this meal. The servants who would usually wipe the dust from their feet as they arrived for a formal dinner were not present. Jesus doesn’t delegate the task to one of the others, but gets up himself, takes off his outer robe, wraps a towel around his waist and poured water in a bowl. He then knelt down and began washing the disciple’s feet. Can you imagine the shock that took place? Here was the man who said he was the Messiah, the man who said he was the Son of God, the man who had spent three years gaining their respect by teaching and doing miracles, the man they called Lord and Master. This man was doing the job of a slave, was voluntarily humiliating himself in front of them.

Then he got to Peter and Peter was having no part of it. He can’t wrap his mind around the fact that Jesus is purposefully demeaning himself. He can’t – he has too high a regard for him. But Jesus tells him if he doesn’t do it then Peter can’t be a part of him and Peter changes his tune and says – then give me a bath! Separation from Jesus was not an option for him.

Then Jesus tells them that this is a lesson in love and humble service. He tells them that he has just given them an example of how they should be towards others, that they need an inner attitude of humble and voluntary service towards others. He makes it personal and tells them that if they truly love him, if they truly respect him, they will follow the pattern he has just set for them.

He ends by telling them that He was sent by God and that God now sends them and if they do as he has taught them then God will bless them for doing it.

#### **IV – NOT A TITLE:**

In less than a week Jesus went from being a man with a title, to being a man with a towel. He went from being the leader of the parade to being a slave. He went from being a King to being a foot washer. And in doing so he showed us that Christianity is not about entitlement, it's about service. This is a lesson we need to relearn today. The church isn't here to serve you, you are here to serve the church.

Over the last few years the Title of Christian has come to mean some kind of superiority. We use it to say that we have some kind of power that non-Christians don't have. It's used by politicians to imply that they have some kind of superiority over those who don't believe the same way they do or disagree with their policies or agendas. Various denominations claim their superiority and their entitlement to a place in heaven while condemning everyone else to the pits of hell. It has been used as a title to justify a gospel of hate spewed out at the cost of oppression on others. It is used to sell books, buy votes, and control lives. A large amount of people today have reduced it to an entitlement program that gives you a get out of hell free card!

That's not what Jesus modeled for us. Christian is not a title it's a way of life. To be a Christian means to follow the example and teachings of Jesus. It means that we love God with all of our hearts, minds and souls, and then love one another just as he loved us. Being a Christian means that we do everything with the love and compassion we have experienced at the foot of the cross. Being a Christian means that we serve Jesus by serving one another as we give drink to the thirsty, food to the hungry, shelter to the homeless, and comfort to the sick. It means taking off our royal robes of Christianity, putting a towel around our waist, and then carrying the living water of Jesus Christ to the feet and souls of everyone in this city.

#### **V – SERVANTS:**

Jesus said that "even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many." (Matt. 20:28). By the end of this week he will humble himself much more than just washing someone's feet. He will be humiliated, tortured, and killed to serve us as he took away our sins. And he calls you to do the same – to serve others – even to the point of death if necessary.

So here's my question for you today and the one I want you to consider this entire week of Christ's Passion. "HOW ARE YOU SERVING JESUS?" or maybe it should be phrased "HOW ARE YOU SERVING OTHERS IN THE NAME OF JESUS?" Because if you're not serving others for Jesus then you're just another person who thinks they're entitled to something they don't really deserve.

It's time to lay down our titles and pick up our towels.

AMEN