

A Great Sermon

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14
Psalm 116
1 Corinthians 11:23-26
John 13:1-15

After the church service a little boy told the pastor, "When I grow up, I'm going to give you some money." "Well, thank you," the pastor replied, "but why?" "Because my daddy says you're one of the poorest preachers we've ever had."

Preaching is not easy; that's why seminary requires Homiletics class. In this class, seminarians are taught to preach. My homiletics class took place in a classroom that looked like a chapel—with an altar, pulpit, and video camera. We took turns preaching and then our classmates critiqued us. Often, their critiques were funny, sometimes they were critiques were painful, and their critiques *always* reminded me that preaching is not easy.

Today we heard a really great sermon—Jesus' sermon at the Last Supper. As with all great sermons, Jesus began with an attention-catching opening image. Rather than using a corny joke He got off the internet, Jesus washed the Apostles' feet. It's obvious that the Apostles were not expecting Him to wash their feet. Jesus' action got their attention and stirred up their curiosity. With all of them fully awake and interested, Jesus explained the meaning and purpose behind His actions. In addition to a great opening, Jesus' message contained two important characteristics of a great sermon.

First, Jesus' sermon was short and to the point. Homiletics 101 teaches that there is no such thing as a "short bad sermon." Short is *always* good. It is even better when the preacher has the gift of saying a LOT with a very small amount of words. Jesus had that gift. Without ever using the words "love," "sacrifice," or "service," Jesus preached eloquently about all three with a simple opening image and only four sentences.

Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me "teacher" and "master," and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.

-John 13:12-15

Another thing that makes Jesus' Last Supper sermon great is its relevance. Relevance has to do with a sermon's context and situation. Had the washing of the Apostles' feet happened anywhere else other than the Last Supper, it would not have had the same significance and meaning. But, in this very particular context and situation, the washing of another person's feet took on the meaning of complete self-sacrifice, service, and love. This great sermon took place in the context of a Passover meal, the institution of the Eucharist, and the institution of the Sacramental priesthood. All three have to do with love, self-sacrifice, and service.

A great way for us to celebrate Holy Thursday and prepare for the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, is to spend the rest of today and tomorrow looking for opportunities to love, sacrifice, and serve. And, since I don't want to break rule #1 and be labeled a "poor preacher," I'll end right there.

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:

- ✚ Write your own sermon on love, sacrifice, and service. What would be your own opening image? How would you convey to your family, friends, co-workers, etc. what love, sacrifice, and service mean?