

**Sermon for  
Red Letter Challenge**  
✠ Serving ✠

**Date:** March 15, 2020

**Location:** St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

**Old Testament:** Proverbs 11:17-20,23-25

**Epistle Reading:** Ephesians 2:1-10

**Gospel Reading:** John 13:1-17

**Sermon Text:** John 13:1-17

**Sermon Title:** Red Letter Challenge: Serving



**Hymns:**

LSB 664 – Fight the Good Fight

LSB 851 – Lord of Glory You Have Bought Us

LSB 857 – Lord Help Us Walk Your Servant Way

**Distribution:**

LSB 637 – Draw Near and Take the Body of the Lord

LSB 543 – What Wondrous Love is This

**Liturgy:**

Divine Service: Creative Worship (with excerpts from D.S.1)



Pastor James Groleau  
St. John's Lutheran Church  
1200 13th Avenue NW  
Austin, MN 55912  
Office: (507) 433-2642  
Shepherd@JamesPlace.net  
StJohnsAustinLCMS.org  
FaceBook.com/StJohnsAustin  
Twitter.com@StJohnsAustinMN  
FaceBook.com/Shepherd.James.Groleau  
KAUS 1480 AM Sun. 9:00am



## **Text: John 13:1-17**

Before the Passover festival, Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go back to the Father. Jesus loved his own who were in the world and he loved them to the end. While supper was taking place the devil had already put the idea of betraying Jesus into the mind of Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. The Father had put everything in Jesus' control. Jesus knew that. He also knew that he had come from God and was going back to God.

So he got up from the table, removed his outer clothes, took a towel, and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel that he had tied around his waist.

When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter asked him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus answered Peter, "You don't know now what I'm doing. You will understand later."

Peter told Jesus, "You will never wash my feet."

Jesus replied to Peter, "If I don't wash you, you don't belong to me."

Simon Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, don't wash only my feet. Wash my hands and my head too!"

Jesus told Peter, "People who have washed are completely clean. They need to have only their feet washed. All of you, except for one, are clean." (Jesus knew who was going to betray him. That's why he said, "All of you, except for one, are clean.")

After Jesus had washed their feet and put on his outer clothes, he took his place at the table again. Then he asked his disciples, "Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me teacher and Lord, and you are right to do so because that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet you must wash each other's feet. I've given you an example that you should follow.

I can guarantee this truth: servants are not superior to their masters, and messengers are not superior to the people who send them. If you understand all of this you are blessed whenever you follow my example.

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Grace to you, and peace, in Jesus' name. Amen.

The account of Jesus on the night when He was betrayed has always intrigued me. I wonder what the bread smelled like, what the lamb smelled like. I wonder how the conversation went. What was it really like when Jesus, in the middle of the conversation, gets up and begins to wash the disciples' feet?

They must have wondered what Jesus was up to, because He was always teaching. There was always something behind what He was doing. He goes around the room, and He gets to Peter, who can never do things the easy way. Peter says, "Never Lord! You will not wash my feet." You can almost hear the other disciples say, "Seriously Peter drama again? Come on..."

Jesus says to Peter, "Unless I wash your feet you are not a part of Me."

Then Peter says, "Well wash all of me!"

Jesus says. "No only your feet are necessary." So He finishes that service to them.

Then with everyone sitting there in absolute silence (and clean feet.) Maybe a little water on the ground around each one of them. Jesus put His outer clothes back on and returns to His place. "Do you understand what I've done for you?" He asked them. "You call me Teacher and Lord and rightly so for that is what I am. Now that I your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I've set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things you will be blessed if you do it." I bet this was a teachable moment the disciples never forgot.

There was a bigger message of service coming in a couple more days. Because Jesus knew exactly what was going to happen, knew exactly where it was going to happen, knew exactly what the cost of His service to humanity would be...

You know the Bible verse, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son..." He served. He loved the world. He gave. In the Bible it says Jesus poured Himself out completely like a pitcher being poured out, emptied completely. With this St. Paul points out that is the service of Christ to us. That's what Jesus did for us. Jesus served. He poured Himself out for you and me.

Jesus knew, that night He washed their feet, that He would pour His life out for those disciples and you. He wasn't going to hold back, so that in the ninth inning He had a little bit left to bring that fastball. He didn't leave a little back in the tank, so that in the fourth quarter He'd have a little more left to play harder.

When Jesus served humanity on the cross He poured himself out completely. So that when you, who are incomplete, look to Jesus on the cross you find complete forgiveness. You find the grace of God for us in Jesus, and find that out pouring, full measure, of God's grace for us.

In our Epistle reading we heard these words:

We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which He prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

You are the unique workmanship of God. He made you, created you, in His own image. His own fingerprints are on your life. What you say, who you are, all of those things are unique to you. What a marvelous blessing that we are created for the purpose of doing good works which God prepared in advance for us to do. We are to serve others. God has prepared, this very day, good works prepared in advance for you to do.

In the Red Letter Challenge this week you will see a heart of faith which causes us to sacrificially give to somebody else, so that they see Jesus in our lives, through us, and see who we are, what it means to be a Christian, through what we do.

When it comes to serving God, I believe the motivation behind what you do is more important than what you do. Let me repeat that: I believe the motivation behind what you do is more important than what you do. Jesus is far more interested in us fulfilling the spirit of the Law than the letter of the Law. It is out of that understanding that I need to remind you of what we are doing here. We've entered into a 40-day challenge to put Jesus' words into practice.

After all that Jesus has done for us, and the ways in which He has served us, and given His life for us, we should be motivated to represent Him well, and do what He asks us to do. We should not be doing this challenge out of guilt or obligation, we aren't doing this challenge gritting our teeth striving to get it done. We are doing this challenge because really at the heart of it, we love Jesus and we want to be the greatest followers, and representative, of Jesus that we can be.

So we've categorized the things, that Jesus invites His followers to put into practice, into 5 main principles:

- Being
- Forgiving
- Serving

- Giving
- Going

There's a purposeful pattern to it. In 'Being' with Jesus we spend time with Him and we see just how much He loves us. Just as important, we see that God has been gracious to us and He forgives us. After being with Him and receiving His forgiveness (given for you most clearly in the Holy Meal we will soon enjoy together), now we are ready and motivated to put His words into practice in our own lives. In other words, after Jesus has done all the hard work, and heavy lifting, we should be ready to do our part in representing Him.

What an opportunity we have. We can point people to Jesus. You were made to serve. You need to serve. God wired you this way. You will experience the greatest fulfillment this side of heaven by contributing, by serving, by living a life that is in service to others. Knowing that is one thing, but you might be saying, "I get it, but I don't know what to do next. I don't know where I can serve."

That's part of why the Church is here. We are here to provide ways to serve. I would challenge every board to come up with a list of ways people can serve. Little things, big things, but come up with a list of things people could do to help your board fulfill its mission and purpose at St. John's.

CASE<sup>1</sup> is a program we've started here. There is a great opportunity for you to serve, and in so many different ways. It's frustrating, to say the least, that there is such resistance for that here by some. I've run programs like this in other churches with such wonderful success. I've watched congregations grow and prosper through it. It provides so many ways for people to serve, and the congregations grows as that service is done.

Now CASE is mostly the sons and daughters of St. John's. Kids from families who worship here with us. Families that have been members of this church for longer than I've been here. CASE grows primarily by these children of St. John's inviting their friends. Yet some would like to run those youth out of this church again, like was done a few years ago when tens of members left this church.

Some of the kids coming from outside this congregation come from some money. Those families could be contributing and serving in our church, if it had not been made so clear to them that they are not welcome. I have actually been told, "You've forgotten the white people." So has my wife. Look around you. See all the "wrong colored" people who have joined since I got here? Well there's my family... I think some have made their point pretty clear.

1 C.A.S.E. Christian After School Education

Some of the kids who come to CASE are among those Jesus calls, “The least of these.” We serve “The least of these” in many ways. We serve them all God’s Holy Word. We serve them a meal that averages \$1.25 and comes only from donations people here choose to make, and other outside sources. We also try to serve them care, security and safety. When some of those come from families who do not know about Jesus or the salvation He brings we spend weeks talking about Baptism, and some of you have been there when those brand new Christians are brought into the family of God. I struggle to fathom how some could take such offense and have such contempt for such things.

Some of these kids come from families who do not, and have never, known the love of Jesus. We through serving them bring that wonder and promise to them.

It’s frustrating, to say the least, that some of these kids have then been told they’re not welcome here.

How are we serving? Let me leave you with Jesus’ words:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all his angels are with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. The people of every nation will be gathered in front of him. He will separate them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right but the goats on his left.

Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, my Father has blessed you! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger, and you took me into your home. I needed clothes, and you gave me something to wear. I was sick, and you took care of me. I was in prison, and you visited me.’

“Then the people who have God’s approval will reply to him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or see you thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you as a stranger and take you into our homes or see you in need of clothes and give you something to wear? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’

The king will answer them, ‘I can guarantee this truth: Whatever you did for one of the least of these you did for me.’

Then the king will say to those on his left, ‘Get away from me! God has cursed you! Go into the everlasting fire that was prepared for the devil and his angels! I was hungry, and you gave me nothing to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger, and you did not take me into your homes. I needed clothes, and you did not give me anything to wear. I was sick and in prison, and you did not take care of me.’

They, too, will ask, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or as a stranger, or in need of clothes or sick or in prison and didn’t help you?’

He will answer them, ‘I can guarantee this truth: Whatever you failed to do for one of the least of these you failed to do for me.’

Jesus ends with these ominous words:

These people will go away into eternal punishment, but those with God’s approval will go into eternal life.

That’s why we’re here. To serve. Not to serve only ourselves, but to serve others too. Most importantly to bring God’s Word of light to those living in darkness. That is the history of the Christian Church.

In the very early Church, when persecution was at its height, times would come when plagues would hit a city or nation. You’ve heard the saying, “Head for the hills!” That comes in part from what people would do when disease came. They would literally run for their lives. They would abandon the cities and leave behind anyone who could not keep up. That would mostly include the very old and very young. When the plague had past they would come back to bury their dead and move on.

What changed was when Christianity came to a town. The plague would come. The people would flee, but the Christians would stay back and care for the very young and the very old, at the risk to their own lives, health, and safety. When the people returned they came back to many who were alive and well.

Through that service the Church grew, in spite of the persecution of some. Service, self-sacrifice, enduring the assault of enemies without striking back. That is, and has always been, an integral part of the Holy Christian faith. As uncertain times approach us, I pray the Church will again be the one who stands out as giving when others are in need. Giving for physical needs first, then through that service Giving God's Word through which God's Salvation is obtained.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.