

Walking - John 13:6-10

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Semmelweis

1. Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis was working at the Vienna General Hospital in 1847 when his friend Dr. Jacob Kolletschka died of a mysterious illness.
2. His finger had been punctured by a scalpel during a postmortem exam & Semmelweis suspected there was a link between the accident & the death of his friend.
3. This was before medicine knew about germs.
4. Kolletschka died of the *same* disease that had killed the person he was doing the autopsy on.
5. Semmelweis drew the conclusion that somehow, *contamination* was passed from the sick to the well & that was how disease was spread.
6. At the time, childbed fever was killing 13% of women & infants in the birthing ward of the hospital Dr. Semmelweis oversaw. The reputation of the hospital was so poor, many women preferred to have their children on the street than in the hospital.
7. Doctors began their day by performing autopsies in the morgue, then would make their rounds of the maternity ward; with no stop to wash their hands or change their exam coats.
8. Semmelweis began requiring all doctors to wash their hands with an antiseptic solution prior to examining the women & children, & to put on a new coat.
9. The mortality rate immediately dropped to 2%.
10. With this success, he began requiring that *all instruments* be sterilized & that doctors not only wash after their morning autopsies, but between each patient. The mortality rate dropped below 1%.
11. This success brought Dr. Semmelweis to the attention of the Vienna Medical Board --
 - a. but they rejected his methods as *unscientific*.
 - b. They said requiring doctors to wash their hands between patients wasted too much time.
12. So those whose desire was *to heal* ended up being *the cause* of infection, disease, & death.
13. Because the truth about germs was unknown, Semmelweis was never able to provide the medical community with a solid reason *why* his methods reduced illness & death.
14. Though he fought long & hard to see his antiseptic routines adopted, they never gained wide-spread acceptance & he was made out to be something of a fanatic by his peers.
15. This led to a mental breakdown & his being committed to an insane asylum where a violent outburst resulted in the guards *beating* him to death.

B. Contamination

1. Dr. Semmelweis' story is one of those sad tales that bring a measure of shame on the human race.
 2. Though he didn't know the root cause of disease, he'd discovered a proven means to *defeat* it.
 3. And try as he might, others who had the power to join him *refused* to listen – allowing a huge cost in suffering to go on.
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4. Semmelweis' story is a potent illustration of an important spiritual truth.
5. One illustrated in our text today. But first we have to set the scene . . .

II. TEXT

A. Set The Scene

1. The Last Supper is coming to an end when Jesus rises from the table, removes his garments, wraps a towel around his waist, takes a basin of water & washes the disciples' feet.
2. Working His way around the table He comes at last to Peter.

B. Vs. 6-7

6 Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?"

1. Last week we looked at the lesson on being a servant vs. 1-17 present.
2. This is one of the most important & beautiful truths we can learn as we follow Jesus.
3. But nestled inside it is *another lesson* drawn from this exchange between Jesus & Peter.
4. It begins with Peter's *surprise* that their Master, would perform what the custom of that day said was a humiliating task.

7 Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this."

5. The washing of their feet was much more than a social courtesy.
6. Jesus' act of humble service *foreshadowed* the soon coming cross.
7. At the time, the disciples didn't see the washing of their feet as anything but an embarrassing moment of humiliation.
8. Later, on the *other side* of the cross – they came to see it as a glorious & beautiful expression of His love, which was even *more* revealed *by* the Cross.
10. Peter DID come to understand. In 1 Peter 5:5, using words reminiscent of Jesus' washing his feet, he says . . .

All of you must be clothed with humility.

11. But *during* the Supper, with the Cross *yet to come*, Peter *didn't* understand. So . . .

C. Vs. 8-10

8 Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."

1. Peter *resisted* the Lord's service.
 2. Jesus then told him that to refuse—meant to be *cut off* from him.
 3. This proves that the washing of their feet *pointed* to the cross.
 4. Jesus is saying that in order to belong to Him we must *accept His work* on our behalf.
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5. This is where many people stumble at responding to the Gospel.
 - a. It's hard for them to admit they've sinned & fallen short of the righteousness God requires.
 - b. If they *do* accept the fact that they're a sinner, they want to find some way to compensate for that sin *on their own*.
 - c. Pride blocks them from *letting* Jesus *serve them* through the cross.
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6. Imagine a group of slaves sitting in chains in a stinking cell, waiting to be sold.
 - a. A wealthy abolitionist comes to the cell, a receipt in hand.
 - b. Through an interpreter, he tells them that he's just paid for their freedom.

- c. The keeper of the cell unlocks the door & the lock that binds their chains to the wall.
 - d. The interpreter tells them they're free to go.
 - e. But a strange thing happens; only a few actually remove the chains from their ankles & wrists & walk out of the cell.
 - f. The rest stay put. They'd been making plans for how to escape.
 - g. They'd invested so much time & effort into their plan that they didn't want to give up on it so quickly.
 - h. Some are even *angry* with the abolitionist for not *consulting them* about how to set them free. They wanted *a hand* in gaining their freedom.
 - i. Of course, these slaves are foolish! Their response to the graciousness of the abolitionist is insane!
 - j. Yet this is exactly what countless unbelievers do every day.
 - 1) Jesus has paid the debt of their sin & the door to their prison of bondage & death stands wide open.
 - 2) But they refuse to leave – because in their pride they want to refuse to let God serve them through the cross.
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7. Jesus said it – **“If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.”**

9 Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!”

8. The thought of being cut off from Jesus *terrified* Peter, so in characteristic fashion, he swung 180 degrees from his previous refusal to have his feet washed & asked for a bath.

10 Jesus said to him, “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.”

9. In the next verse John tells us Jesus was referring to Judas.

D. Confession & Cleansing

1. But it's what Jesus says in the *first part* of v. 10 that we need to concentrate on today. **“He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean.”**
2. What does Jesus mean by this?
3. For the last 3 years the disciples had faithfully followed Jesus.
 - a. But they weren't *born again* because Jesus hadn't gone to the cross & been raised from the dead.
 - b. Their faith in Him as the Messiah had brought them into a fellowship with Him that was a kind of '*provisional salvation*.'
 - c. In just a few minutes He will say to them, **“You are already clean because of the word I have spoken unto you.” [15:3]**
4. Even though they were clean—Jesus says that they needed to have their *feet washed*.
5. As Jews who were well acquainted with the OT, these words reminded the disciples of the Book of Exodus.
 - a. In ch. 29, when a priest was *first* consecrated to his office, he was given a bath, then put on the priestly garments. This ritual bath was only done *once* – when he was first welcomed into the priesthood. [29:4]
 - b. Then, one ch. later, we read about the *laver*, the bronze basin of water that stood between the altar & the tabernacle.
 - c. It was there the priests washed their hands & feet *every time* they entered the tent where God's presence was manifest. [30:17-21]

- d. The laver was made of the **bronze mirrors** of the women of Israel. **WHY?**
[38:8]
- 1) As many of you know water is often seen in Scripture as a symbol of the Word of God.
 - 2) In Ephesians 5:26 we read of the washing of the water by the Word.
 - 3) In John 15:3 Jesus said the disciples were clean through the Word He'd spoken.
 - 4) Psalm 119:9 – The young person cleans his/her way by taking heed to the Word of God.
6. The bronze for the laver came from mirrors to serve as a symbol that it's as we look into the Word of God that we see the truth about ourselves – just as the priest would stand over the laver & look down at the water, seeing a reflection of himself.
 7. Every Christian knows the experience of reading or hearing the Word of God & it being like looking into a **spiritual mirror**.
 - a. 2 Tim. 3:16 says that the Scriptures **reprove** us – that is, they **challenge** us at those points that lie outside God's will.
 - b. There's no greater diagnostic for our lives than the Bible.
 8. Besides reprovng us, the Word also **corrects & instructs** us.
 - a. It doesn't leave us hopelessly aware of our brokenness & need.
 - b. It shows us how to be right & comforts us with the knowledge of God's tender mercy & power to change us.
 9. We have a navigation system in our van.
 - a. Every so often we use it to chart out a route to a new destination.
 - b. We type in the address; the satellite figures out where we currently are, then plots the best course there.
 - c. The screen tells us how far to the next turn.
 - d. If for some reason we take a **wrong** turn, a warning flashes & tells us it's recalculating a new route back to the right one.
 - e. That's like the Scriptures.
 - 1) Here we are in a fallen world – Our destination is heaven.
 - 2) The route from here to there, the life we **ought** to live is described right here.
 - 3) But within this book is also a prescription for how to get back on track when we take a wrong turn – which we all do.
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10. That's really what Jesus is talking about here.
 - a. The priest of old was **initially** consecrated to his office by a bath,
 - b. But before he could enter the place where God's presence was manifested, he had to go to the laver & wash his feet & hands.
 - c. Though He was **always** a priest, his **daily life** saw his hands & feet soiled with things that were unworthy of the holiness of God.
 - d. They had to be **cleansed** before fellowship with God could be experienced.
 11. Titus 3:5 says that when we were **first** born again, God washed us **clean** from sin.
 - a. Though we're born again, we live in a world that's in almost every way contrary to God.
 - b. We **all** know the tension & temptation that comes from **just living** in this world.
 - c. It's inevitable that as we make our way though life, the moral & spiritual pollution around us is going to **splash** onto us.
 - d. If we want to enjoy intimate fellowship with God, we need to **come clean** with Him, confessing our sin, receiving His forgiveness.
 12. Think of it this way – In Jesus' day, before going to a feast, guests would take a bath

at *their* homes.

- a. But walking to the party, their feet would get soiled on those dirty, disgusting roads.
- b. So entering the house they would cleanse their feet, & be *fully* clean once more.
- c. What Jesus is saying in v. 10 is that when we're born again it's like a *spiritual bath* that's only done once.
- d. But as we walk through this fallen world with its moral pollution our spiritual feet get soiled.
- e. So we need to regularly come to the Lord for cleansing & the renewal of *fellowship* that comes with confession & forgiveness.
- f. John makes this crystal in 1 John 1:9 –

If we confess [literally – If we are continually confessing] our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

13. *Continual confession* is important because it removes the obstacles to our fellowship with God.
 - a. Psalm 66:18 says if we *regard* iniquity in our hearts, God will not hear us.
 - b. In 59:2 Isaiah says that sin *breaks fellowship* with Him.
14. Confession is facing our sin *honestly*, admitting that it's wrong & asking God to restore His favor.
15. Think of it this way: Lynn & I are married – we're in covenant with one another.
 - a. That covenant began in May, 1980 & saw us become *legally* husband & wife. That's the *relationship* we're in.
 - b. But our *fellowship*, our present experience of life *with one another*, is determined by how we're doing *today*.
 - c. Our *relationship* stands on the basis of our *legal covenant*, but our *fellowship* stands on *daily interaction*.
 - d. Lynn & I are husband & wife even when I'm in half-way round the world.
 - 1) That **Relationship** doesn't change according to circumstances.
 - 2) But when 6,000 miles lies between us & there's no phone service, there's no **Fellowship**.
 - e. In a similar way, we can both be in the same room, but if I've done or said something that's *hurt* my wife, fellowship is damaged.
 - f. The path *back to fellowship* lies in the confession of my error & the granting of her forgiveness.
16. As the born again children of God, we are in *covenant* with Him.
 - a. Our *Relationship* is Father & children. That *doesn't change*.
 - b. But our *Fellowship* with God *is* affected by our walk.
 - c. As we travel through the corruption of this world, it's inevitable that its evil influences will splatter us.
 - d. When they do, the path back to intimate fellowship is to *confess* our sin.
 - e. John makes it clear in 1 John 1:9 that *if we do our part* & confess, God **WILL** do His & forgive.
17. Some of us carry around a little bottle of antibacterial hand wash.
 - a. We know that there's germs *everywhere* & they're easily transferred from one to another.
 - b. Door handles, countertops, money – all of these are prime places for the transmission of germs.
 - c. So we carry a little bottle of hand wash & use it after we've been in contact with

- these things or before we eat.
18. We ought to have that attitude about confession.
 - a. It ought to be something we're in the *habit of doing* as often as we're conscious of sin.
 - b. As soon as the Holy Spirit convicts us, we ought to turn to Him, admit what we've done is wrong, & ask forgiveness.
 19. I had jury duty Wednesday & the jury room was packed!
 - a. There's a lot of respiratory flu going around right now & people were sniffing, coughing, & hacking all over the place.
 - b. It gave me the ebbie-jeebies.
 - c. But even worse, on Thursday morning I was standing in line to get a latte & a high school girl sneezed on my back – I felt the air hit my shirt & neck.
 - d. Both days, I didn't feel like I needed this [little bottle] – I needed this [huge bottle]. I wanted to just put it on all over – often!
 - e. If we could SEE germs, we'd be using hand wash all day long! God's forgiveness isn't this – it's an ocean full of this.
 - f. If you accidentally step in dogdoo, you don't just carry on as if nothing happened. It reeks so you do your best to wipe or hose it off as soon as you can.
 - g. That's the way we ought to treat sin.
 - 1) Don't save up your sin till you can go to a confessional & spill it to a priest.
 - 2) Don't save it up till your morning devotions then pray a *general* prayer about *yesterday's* sins, that more than likely you've forgotten about anyway.
 - h. Get into the *habit* of confessing sin *as soon as* the Spirit convicts you.
 20. Here's why this is important –
 - a. Regular confession increases our *appreciation* for what Jesus did in paying for our sins at the cross.
 - b. Regular confession reminds us that any *blessing* we enjoy is the result of God's *grace* & not because we're so good.
 - c. Regular confession *dismantles the strongholds* the enemy tries to build through unconfessed sin.
 - 1) When we neglect to deal with sin, it becomes a *beachhead* for the enemy.
 - 2) With more sin, that beachhead becomes a *breach* in the wall of our soul.
 - 3) That breach then turns into a *tower*, a stronghold of *addiction*.
 - 4) Confession of sin is like throwing away the bricks of evil the devil wants to build a fortress with.

III. CONCLUSION

A. One Another

1. As we end today, there's one last application of this we need to consider.
2. As we saw last Sunday, the larger lesson of vs. 1-17 is the call to follow Jesus by *being servants*.
3. The inner lesson of vs. 6-10 is the need to make *regular confession* of sin a standing practice in our walk with the Lord.
4. But there's a point at which the 2 lessons *intersect*. In v. 14 Jesus said . . .
“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.”
5. As servants of Christ, we don't walk alone.
6. We serve Him by serving one another.
7. And one of the most important ways we do that is through extending grace &

forgiveness to each other.

- a. Not only must we wash one another's feet, we must let our feet *be* washed.
 - b. Confession & forgiveness ought to be as normal & expected among the people of Christ as breathing.
 - c. Living in this fallen world, in this unfinished life we call the Christian walk, we're going to sin against one another. Hurt & failure are inevitable.
 - d. We shouldn't be surprised or freaked when it happens - *Expect* it.
 - e. The important thing is to remember when it does is that we're to wash each other's feet.
8. I end with this – Ephesians 4:32

32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.