

Jesus was a thirty-three year old single Palestinian male on the night before he died. If he had been American instead, I think things would have gone differently. The night before he died -- at that age, he'd be drinking beer, traveling to Hawaii, running up his charge card, or overdosing on donuts. I think he'd be chewing out his lawyers, driving fast, punishing his enemies, and complaining about the waiters at the Last Supper.

But instead he did something very different. He washed the feet of his disciples. He leaves this world not in a blaze of extravagance and revenge. He hangs up his life in a gesture of loving service -- washing feet.

Eighteen hundred years earlier, while Abraham was sitting outside his tent by the oaks of Mamre one hot day, he looked up and saw God under the form of three mysterious visitors. Abraham greeted them and said, "Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree" (Gen 18:4).

When David sent his servants to Abigail to ask her to marry him, she greeted them and said, "Your servant is a slave to wash the feet of the servants of my lord" (1 Sam 25:41).

When a sinful woman appeared at the home of Simon the Pharisee where Jesus was a dinner guest, Jesus complained to Simon, "I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair" (Luke 7:44).

In biblical times, if guests came to your home, they could expect to get their feet washed. But you wouldn't do it. Your servants would do it.

Things are different in America today. If somebody drops by your house, you don't wash their feet. You tell them you're too busy for a visitor right now. Or you don't even answer the door, suspicious that strangers have come only to violate your home and your person. Streets are no more dangerous today than they were in Jesus' time, but we demand privacy, and we avoid service.

Today, people don't think highly of service. Very few people aspire to be priests, religious, police, or teachers. Those professions don't pay much. They won't let you have things. People want a lot of money very quickly and early retirement. If they can't get it with a job, they try the lottery, or a televised game show. People want wealth. They don't want to perform service.

In many subtle ways we put down our public servants. We complain about congress, but we do not vote. We want more police officers, but we consider them enemies with radar. We want the right to sue and incarcerate, but we don't want jury duty. We want lakes and parks, but we don't want to recycle.

By washing feet at the Last Supper, Jesus made a connection between service and salvation. If Jesus had been a thirty-year old single American male, he would have promised salvation without service. That would have been easier to sell. But he preached another gospel, a gospel that urges us to get down on our hands and knees, to pick up after children, to lobby for the rights of prisoners, and to let other drivers have their way on the roads. Jesus is the means to salvation, but he offers it

through the cross of service.