



19 FEBRUARY 2018

I HAVE SET YOU AN EXAMPLE

John 13:3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, **4** got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. **5** Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. **6** He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" **7** Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." **8** Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." **9** Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" **10** Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." **11** For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." **12** After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?" **13** You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. **14** So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. **15** For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

*Here we may reign secure, and in my choice
to reign is worth ambition though in Hell:*

Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven.¹

In Milton's *Paradise Lost* we encounter Lucifer in a reflective mood. He briefly considers repenting and asking for God's forgiveness – but then declares that he unwilling to submit and for this reason “**Better to reign in Hell, than to serve in Heaven**”. The fact is that nobody wants to be a servant! We all want to be captains of our own lives and resent being a servant of other people. This is particularly true of our South African society, where the majority of our population were legally forced to serve a privileged minority. Now that we have a new, democratically constituted country, those who had formerly been servants have no wish to be servants. Neither do their children have any desire to serve anybody – everyone wants to be a boss.

Jesus lived in a similar environment. He faced a Roman oppressor that compelled those they defeated to serve the Empire; he also faced a hierarchical religious leadership who thought that sinners ought to serve the righteous. Those who were the servants of his society resented this – and dreamed of a day when they would be in charge of their own destiny: In fact the essence of Milton's words can be heard

¹ [Paradise Lost, Book I, Lines 221-270](#)

echoing through every generation of human life: human beings cry that it is better to be free to rule my own life in harsh conditions than to be a servant of another person in luxurious surroundings. But this is not the way of Jesus!

Jesus washes his disciples' feet – and then asks them to follow his example. Despite knowing that his disciples would be resistant to his ideas, Jesus is blunt: *I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.* Now this is not natural to human nature. Neither is this our culture. And this is definitely not easy. But Jesus asks us to go beyond our natural inclinations and live a counter-cultural lifestyle. Jesus-followers are called to live a life of service to humanity. Will you step up?

For Reflection

Brother, sister, let me serve you.

Let me be as Christ to you.

Pray that I might have the grace

To let you be my servant, too.

Richard M S Irwin.

The Second Sunday in Lent

The Cost of Discipleship

The Scripture passage for the day is drawn from Reuben Job and Norman Shawchuck, A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and other Servants, (Nashville, The Upper Room 1983), 112.

This reflection is from my own devotional exercises for the day.