

## MAKING OUR MEMORIES GO TO WORK

By

CHARLES COLSON

Text: John 13:1-20	Date: 4/27/08	#0821
--------------------	---------------	-------

A year ago when we were celebrating our 49<sup>th</sup> birthday, I asked the congregation to think ahead. I said that the truth of an anniversary is not in how big the number, “but in the memories that are worth bringing forward into the present.” I proposed that we take the twelve months leading up to our fiftieth celebration to bring forward stories that challenge us to follow Jesus Christ.

Last week I had the adult class reflect on such stories. I put before them three OT passages and three NT ones. I helped them think about the passages by also providing an artist’s interpretation for each one. In this way the class began to tell many stories about what we have done as Faith Presbyterian Church. Then, I asked the class to decide which passage represented Faith Church the best. It was a close vote between our OT lesson, Moses at the burning bush and the NT lesson, Jesus washing the feet of the disciples.

Let me give some examples of how our discussion progressed. The account of Moses hearing God speak to him out of a burning bush and receiving an assignment to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt reminded Ann Greenwood of the call to her and others to be deacons and elders for our

congregation. The story of Ruth the Moabite woman being protected and encouraged by Boaz, the owner of the field in which she was gleaning, recalled to Barbara Newman our longstanding commitment of providing meals for Daybreak. The story of Jesus taking five loaves and two fish and feeding 5,000 people brought to Amy Waters' mind the tension in our congregation between "we don't have enough" and "there is an abundance." The disciples, you'll remember, said to Jesus how can five loaves and two fish feed 5,000? Of course that passage challenges us to see the abundance since at the end of meal, the disciples picked up twelve baskets of leftovers.

Anniversaries often entail family reunions. In fact over the last eight months we have been holding a series of family reunions decade by decade. Last night, with over 150 in attendance at our celebration dinner, it was the bonds within Faith church that brought us together. When my parents celebrated their 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, my sister and I invited as many relatives as we could to a surprise party. But it was no surprise that when we were all together we shared family stories. As Christians our most authentic relationships are told and retold in the bible; so it is critical when we get together as Church people that we connect what we're doing, what we're thinking and planning with these fundamental Christian stories. Otherwise we could be accused of having no integrity of faith.

The picture on the bulletin cover depicts the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. Last week the class selected this picture to represent the story that best tells who we are or are to

be as Faith Church. They also liked the muscle-shirt portrayal of Jesus. The picture was painted by Ford Madox Brown, a British artist, who has painted other Biblical stories. If you're ever in London, you can see this painting at the Tate Gallery.

Now we usually reflect on the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet during Holy Week, because from the perspective of John, this activity was the highlight of the Last Supper. Note that Peter resisted having his feet washed by Jesus. Washing feet was a regular act of hospitality in those days when people wore sandals. Plus, it was the work of servants to wash the guests' feet. But here was Jesus their master performing servant's work: How utterly shocking. This certainly contributed to Peter's resistance; however, Peter relented. Then Jesus made the point that if I your teacher and Lord have washed your feet, you also are to wash one another's feet.

During Lent another group in our church asked the question: why don't we wash one another's feet. We baptize following Jesus' command, and we celebrate the Lord's Supper also at Jesus' command. Jesus commands that we wash one another's feet why don't we do this? The discussion then included such comments as: I wouldn't want anyone touching my feet, because that's kind of intimate. I'd have to take my shoes off and my feet smell bad. Others recounted the spiritual depth of the experience when they did have their feet washed in a worship service. And still others remembered that several years ago it was challenging enough when we washed hands during a

Maundy Thursday service in the fellowship hall. “I’m giving you an example,” says Jesus. What really was the example?

In looking at the Ford Madox Brown painting last Sunday, Chuck Waters was struck by the surprise on the faces of disciples in the background. He went on to relate incidents in Faith Church which have shocked us even pushed us into uncomfortable zones. Our discussion of new music for worship was one example. But another was our endeavor into discerning Faith Church’s vision through our Faith on the Road process. This has been uncomfortable for a number of folks, despite the fascinating conversations that have resulted. When Jesus gives us an example to follow, the fantasy is that we all will immediately climb on board, whereas the reality is what Jesus told Peter: “you do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” The unspoken words are: so hang in there.

It is told that a congregation worked for several months to identify each other’s gifts and bring them forth. In the process a quiet woman asked the pastor to accompany him on hospital visits. Then she asked if she might pray with the patients. As she began to do so, remarkably they began to get better—some physically, some spiritually. After several weeks of this the pastor asked her point blank, “What’s going on? Do you think you have the Spirit’s gift of healing?” “Yes,” she replied; and she had thought so for some time. Well, why hadn’t she spoken up before? Her reply was because nobody had asked, and she didn’t really know what to do with her hunch.

The poet Marilyn Chandler McEntyre, whose friend was the pastor of that church, says: “this story makes me wonder what if we spent more time in our faith communities not only identifying what gifts we have among us, but also what gifts we need.” I would say that the example of Jesus washing feet is one of boldly identifying and calling out and giving permission to use our spiritual gifts. We are in fact a congregation of very gifted people. We have already begun identifying our gifts and sharing stories about them. We are servants to one another when we call attention to the gifts we have to share.

So, as a fiftieth anniversary gift to ourselves instead of just talking about our gifts, let us trust them by intentionally putting more of our gifts into the service of Christ. Let us encourage our Faith on the Road endeavor to inquire into the gifts we need so that we may bring a renewed focus to Faith Presbyterian Church for our next fifty years.