

## “STANDING OUT”

A Sermon for the Consecration of Jody Winter as Deaconess, June 18, 2016

Text: John 13:1-16

Of the four gospels John is my favorite, for a simple reason. In the gospel of John, more than in the other three, Jesus teaches us to see ourselves in him, and to see him in ourselves. This is useful for a day as personal as when the church commissions and consecrates someone to be a minister of Jesus Christ.

In John, Jesus teaches us to see that just as he came “from above,” you and I are born “from above”—through baptism. He wants us to know that as he is going to the Father, you and I will also go to the Father, so that where he is, we may be also. There are many passages like that, in which you and I are required not merely to lionize Jesus but to identify strongly with him, to see ourselves in our hero, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are given to know that we all, together, share with Jesus our place of birth and our destination. “I in them,” he says to the Father, talking about you and me, “and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” Etc. By the time he ascended to the Father, Jesus had super-glued himself to his people.

Furthermore, John makes clear that for us to identify with Jesus is not as simple as having our name written in a register or holding hands and singing “Kum ba yah.” Identifying with Jesus means that, in this world, we will stand out. Just as Jesus stood out at the Last Supper.

If Bill Locker had showed up at the last supper during the foot-washing ceremony he would have asked everyone to please go stand over there so he could get a group photo. He would have had the photo developed and brought back a copy for everyone.

If years later we were to open the Gospel of John, we might discover that John saved the photo and pasted it into his book about Jesus, next to verse four of chapter 13. There we would see thirteen fellows who looked like brothers, which some of them were. They all had similar beards; long, greasy hair; they were obviously friends; they looked little stressed out. A sharp eye might notice that they were Galileans--perhaps from the style of their outer garments?

But one person in that photo would stand out. And it wouldn't be Judas (although his outer robe might have looked Judean?). It would be Jesus. Jesus would stand out.

Looking at this photo, we would wonder immediately why one of them was dressed incompletely. Inappropriately One was wearing only your basic no-nonsense tunic, a cheap, nondescript inner garment that came to the knees. Where was the handsome cloak his Mom must have made for him, which a respectable man would wear over his tunic? Had some workman, some yokel wandered onto the set of the last supper? This man was dressed for soccer, not supper. Why hadn't Bill asked him to move aside so he could get a nice group photo? And couldn't the editor of this book have cropped him out, for goodness' sake?

The oddball was Jesus, of course. Our assumption that guy #13 was a servant or slave was simply wrong. The man in the tunic was the Lord of the rest of them. Dressed . . . like the least of them. “First last,” and so on. (Practice what you preach!)

When Jesus said “As the Father has sent me, so I sent you,” he wanted his disciples to pay close attention to how the Father had sent him—so they

could follow suit. “For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Playing the role of a servant even to the point of dressing down, was Jesus telling you and me what we are—servants of all. We are not better than our master. And our master has washed our feet.

What is remarkable about that? What is so special about Jesus stooping to perform this menial task for his inferiors? What is remarkable is why he did it. Jesus didn’t do it because it was the right thing to do. He didn’t do it because being a good Messiah called for this kind of behavior. He washed their feet because he wanted to. And he wanted to because he loved them.

Did you notice the foot washing in the first reading? Do you see how Abram did not want to wash the feet of his guests by the oaks of Mamre? He didn’t have to. He didn’t need to. And he didn’t. He said, “Let water be brought so *you* can wash your own feet.”

Also in last Sunday’s Gospel, Jesus did not expect Simon to actually wash his feet. He said, “You didn’t give me water so I could wash my own feet.”

But here, at the Last Supper, something revolutionary was happening. Jesus, with no obligation at all to wash his disciples’ feet, instead of thinking himself worthy of a little special treatment on his last night before giving his life for his disciples, instead of asking them to draw straws to see who would get to do the honors and wash his feet, “got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began . . . to wash their feet.”

As Jesus said of his impending death, “No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

“No one makes me wash your feet, I wash them of my own accord.”

Outstanding. A revolution. A turning around of custom. An in-breaking of a new Spirit; free, joyful, willing service of others. Not in the spirit of obligation, but because we love.

What powered that turn of events? John explains what made Jesus stand out. We can stand out in the same way. Jesus was able to lay down his life—in foot-washing and crucifixion—for people who did not have it coming, because he knew three things: Jesus knew where he was from, he knew where he was going, and he knew why God put him on earth. John 13:3 reads thus: Jesus, “knowing (1) that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he (2) had come from God and (3) was going to God-----did something unexpected. Unexpected. Full of grace, he got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 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.

Jody, you are being commissioned, consecrated, and installed today so that you will stand out among us as one who will help us all remember that to be in Christ means to be like Jesus. Your particular ministry of deaconess should serve as a sign for all to whom you minister, of how good it is for all of us to know that we are from God and are going to God, and that Jesus has given into our hands what God put into his hands—his sheep, his lambs. God has given into our hands the feet of the world, for us to wash.

Stand out, Jody. But in this world full of people who are outstanding for one thing or another, may you stand out for knowing who you are because of the one in the simple tunic, holding the bowl, with the towel around the waist. Let the world see Jesus in you. Amen.