

**Signs of Significance**  
**Servanthood**  
**John 13:1-17**  
**Ypsilanti First United Methodist Church**  
**February 24, 2008**

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**Note: This sermon began with church Musician Teresa Rawson singing "Lean on Me"—to hear her, go back to the church website and click on video links.**

If there ever was a contemporary anthem on servant hood—this week's sign of significance—Bill Withers's song "Lean on Me" is it. He tells it like it is: *"Sometimes in our lives we all have pain-We all have sorrow-But if we are wise We know that there's always tomorrow -- Lean on me, when you're not strong, And I'll be your friend I'll help you carry on For it won't be long 'Til I'm gonna need Somebody to lean on. we all need somebody to lean on."*

Christian servant hood is always an act of showing another person love. Servanthood—is the practice of putting others before yourself. It means letting go of what you treasure in order to meet a need for someone else. Sometimes it involves letting go of treasured things in order to be used for others. Sometimes it means letting go of treasured time to be invested toward others. Sometimes it may be letting go of a treasured position (for example a privilege or honor) to serve another. But it always involves giving of yourself to benefit or assist someone else.<sup>1</sup>

And like the song says—sometimes we are the ones showing the love and other times, we are those in need of love and service. Either way, it is a shocking thing these days to see this kind of love pouring out.

Our scripture lesson for today tells us "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."

Imagine any world leader doing this today. Think of George Bush removing the patent leather shoes and moist dress socks of congressional subcommittee members and washing the lint and jam from between their toes. Or, think of him washing the feet of presidential hopefuls whose very campaigns grind out hostile press

releases against him. Or what if instead he's tugging the toes of Putin, Mubarak, or Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. (the president of Iran)

The humility of Christ is what stuns us. The King of Kings chose the servant's role as an object lesson. In Jesus' days, foot washing was not symbolic, but rather practical. Dusty, muddy and manure-strewn roads made sandaled feet a mealtime buzzkill. The first-century household slave would always get the foot-washing task as it was one of the most demeaning and filthy tasks in their culture. Mike Rowe of Discovery Channel's Dirty Jobs would have a field day with this task.

But here is Jesus, doing this dirty job. A servant's work—and he chooses to do it. To further the irony of the Messiah washing feet, in Luke's version of this story—we are told that during the upper room discourse the disciples are arguing about which of them is the greatest. (Luke 22:24).

Chest thumping interrupted by foot washing.

Servanthood---it's this week's sign of significance. It is the object lesson Jesus gives us—it is our calling as followers of the Christ

*Lean on me, when you're not strong  
And I'll be your friend  
I'll help you carry on  
For it won't be long  
'Til I'm gonna need  
Somebody to lean on*

Carefully, lovingly, Jesus washed the disciples' feet, and they were to do as he had done. To whom? Each other? Their disciples? The outside world? And what were they supposed to do? Go wash feet, or is there something else that Jesus had in mind?

Who is the one person whose "feet" God wants you to "wash?" How should you do this?

*Lean on me, when you're not strong  
And I'll be your friend  
I'll help you carry on  
For it won't be long  
'Til I'm gonna need  
Somebody to lean on*

After he washed their feet, Jesus also said:

A new commandment I give to you —  
Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.  
(John 13:34)

Renowned bible teacher and Commentator, William Barclay says this about the significance of servanthood.

“The world may assess a person’s greatness by what one owns, by one’s intellectual ability, the number of committees which this one is a member of or chair of, or the size of one’s bank account and assets or by the material possessions which this one has amassed. But in the assessment of Jesus Christ these things are irrelevant. His assessment is quite simply this... How many people has this person served? Therein lies greatness.”<sup>ii</sup>

Pastor Denny Bellesi was interviewed by Dateline NBC, after his church did the first Kingdom assignment—you will remember that was what we did a few years ago here—when 50 people received \$100 and were asked to invest it to expand God’s kingdom—the reporter asked Pastor Denny why his church was doing this project and he responded—“I think the world is sick and tired of hearing from the church” He went on to say “What the world needs, I suspect is to see the church be who we say we actually are. And that inescapably involves serving Christ, by practically serving others, especially the least of these among us.”<sup>iii</sup>

I have good news to report to you this morning—our second Kingdom assignment offering has been growing. Remember this is where we asked for volunteers to look through their stuff and find something they could sell that would be worth \$100. Well... I am pleased to tell you that our offering, with some donations that have come in this week stands now at nearly \$8,000! And if you recall this offering from the proceeds of the sale of our stuff—this offering is not for us—not for our church, but rather for the least of these among us. It is an offering for the poor and needy. It is a message of servant hood—and a way to show our community and the world that we are truly being the church we say we are. How? Serving Christ by serving others. As disciples seeking lives of significance and meaning, Jesus calls us, as he did—to acts of love—acts of service and servanthood. This is my commandment that you love one another, as I have loved you.

*Lean on me when you're not strong  
And I'll be your friend  
I'll help you carry on*

*For it won't be long  
Till I'm gonna need  
Somebody to lean on.  
**Amen.***

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<sup>i</sup> Bellesi, Denny and Leesa The Kingdom Assignment 2 Zondervan pp. 99-100

<sup>ii</sup> Barclay, William as quoted by Denny Bellesi in The Kingdom Assignment 2 Zondervan pp. 101-102

<sup>iii</sup> IBID p. 102

Note—other ideas from this sermon were taken from [www. homileticsonline.com](http://www.homileticsonline.com)—Thursday Theology-sermon ideas for John 13