

**That Time of the Year Again ZCC 1.5.14**

**John 13:12-17; 31b-36**

***So when he had washed their feet, put his outer garment back on, and sat down again, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me, ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord.’ You say so correctly, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Most certainly I tell you, a servant is not greater than his lord, neither one who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them...Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and he will glorify him immediately. Little children, I will be with you a little while longer. You will seek me, and as I said to the Jews, ‘Where I am going, you can’t come,’ so now I tell you. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered, “Where I am going, you can’t follow now, but you will follow afterwards.” WEB***

**“Mommie—if you let me go to the party, I’ll be good.” “If you’ll buy me that doll, I promise I’ll be good for the rest of the year.” “I’m sorry, I promise I’ll never hit my brother again—please don’t ground me.”**

**Kids will promise almost anything to get what they want, won’t they? It is a good thing that we grow out of that kind of thing, isn’t it?**

**Except politicians—seems that when they make promises, they know they won’t keep them and so do we. Makes me wonder if it is still even a promise if everyone already knew. Still, promises are easy for all of us to make and sometimes hard to keep. Abusive spouses promise to stop, but that is a hard promise to keep.**

**Brides and grooms promise, “till death do us part...” but most divorce.**

**Did you ever make a New Year's resolution and then break it? If you have, hold up your hand. Well—maybe I should have asked if you have ever KEPT one.**

**I heard a comedian say that a New Year's resolution is a promise you make to yourself that you don't intend to keep.**

**I hope that's for “regular people” not Christians. I hope that we Christians at least INTEND to keep the promises we make to ourselves, to God, and to each other.**

**It is a tiny bit late, but I'd like to offer a bit of advice as to the content of your resolutions this year. No, I am NOT going to tell you to eat better and to eat less and to exercise 30 minutes at least 3 times a week—though it appears that might be good for most of us and doing so would probably help us live longer and better. I'm not going to tell you to stop smoking—though if you smoke you SHOULD stop. I DO encourage each of us to do these things because our bodies are important to God and CERTAINLY important to us.**

**Instead, I'm going to offer some possible SPIRITUAL resolutions that may also have bearing on the length and/or the quality of our physical lives as well as the quality of our spiritual lives.**

**The importance of the passage I just read can't be over-stated. If you look at the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> verses of this same chapter, you will see why I think that:**

***Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his time had come that he would depart from this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end...Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he came from God, and was going to God... NEB***

**According to these verses, Jesus knew that he was through here. He knew the end was coming right away. Over and over and over they didn't get it and just like the football coach that calls his quarterback to the sidelines just before the game starts—Jesus wanted to say, “if you don't remember anything else, remember this...” or “make SURE you get this part right...”**

**As far as we know, God didn't make any plan-B arrangements. Jesus' followers were IT as far as spreading the Gospel went. People from then until now—including us—depended on their hearing and doing.**

**So Jesus wanted to make the best of this last opportunity.**

**First came an object lesson. You know what that is. We normally use them often to teach children but I believe they are powerful ways to teach adults also. I've used them here and will again.**

**So, the Son of God stripped off his jacket and shirt and his tie—down to his tee-shirt and slacks—and got a towel and some water and washed their filthy feet.**

**That picture is worth a thousand words.**

**All my life I've heard father and uncles and others say, “do as I say, not as I do.” I can promise you that Jesus never said that. His entire life was one of example. His life says, “do as I have done...”**

**He was the leader who would serve. He was the honored guest who stood at the back of the room. He was the master who washed Peter's dirty feet.**

**Object lesson or not, I don't believe Jesus intended for us to wash each other's feet—though there are Christian groups who practice that—and I can't see where it hurts anything as a symbol of Jesus' life and his service and his love as models for our actions.**

**But I think there is much more. If we look at the washing metaphorically, the disciples were already-clean believers who were no longer perfectly clean and needed a touch-up. Does that make sense?**

**At the surface, Jesus' example for us was service to our fellow Christians. It was putting away our pride and putting others ahead of us. Important but not as important as the central message.**

**If your fellow believers get a little dirty—build them up instead of tearing them down.**

**All my life I've watched Christians act like sharks in a feeding frenzy.**

**Don't.**

**It's easy to do isn't it? If I point out your failures (and, of course, tell everyone I know) then I don't have to look at my own. If you point out mine, you don't have to look at your own (assuming you have some).**

**Don't do it.**

**Jesus, in his last-chance coaching session shows us that we are NOT to tear each other down, but to build each other up even if it takes away our dignity and even though it hurts our pride and no matter what our position in life.**

**No “what's in it for me.” No seeking recognition.**

**Yet we want to take pride in our humility and our service don't we? How does that fit**

**Building up and serving from the basis of love and humility. Jesus did it all his life—from his humble birth to his criminal's death. Giving up his pride his privilege his kingdom and his crown.**

**And then, just in case they didn't get it—in case WE didn't get it—he says that we are to follow his example and reminds us that we no better than he is. We KNOW that is true, right? Again—we just celebrated the Master of the Universe being born in a stable to a peasant family. King of Kings. Lord of Lords. Creator. Sustainer.**

**“Little children, I am giving you a charge—I am sending you out to build up and to serve and don't forget that you are not greater than me...”**

**Then in this one-two punch of a teaching session, he hits us with the other punch.**

**Love.**

**Real love. True love. Forgiving love. Helping love. Building up love. Unconditional love. Washing love. Humble love.**

**Love for one another.**

**When he says “Little children...” he is speaking spiritually. They were and we are limited in our abilities and our understanding and our knowledge and experience. Just as children are. Maybe that explains the object lesson.**

**In the second part of the passage, he fleshes out the idea of service and building up and love.**

**“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another...” and then goes on to tell them that it is their love that will make them stand out. Their love for each other will be what gives them the power to win souls and to spread the Gospel around the world.**

**Well, that isn't exactly what he says, but it is implied, don't you think?**

**“Love one another or the world will see you as fakes—prideful hypocrites who aren't relevant to either my sacrifice or their world.”**

**I think that's implied also.**

**“Love one another.” I don't think this was really a new concept but here in the last seconds before the game started—before they would be in charge of the Gospel (almost literally) then he makes it a command.**

**Jesus looked over his bunch—his team if you like that metaphor—and he could see them in their ability and their disabilities. Peter could be unlovable. Thomas could be skeptical. They were all attracted to the possibility of importance and power in Jesus' kingdom.**

**With all their imperfections, it would be hard to make this happen once he was gone. How could he keep them going in adversity and danger and death?**

**Love for him and love for each other.**

**He says, “follow my example and heed my command.”**

**Serve each other and build each other up when we manage to get a little bit dirty—instead of gossiping and tearing down. Serve each other humbly and without desire for recognition. Love each other unconditionally—as I have loved you and built you up and washed you as a servant would.**

**Love each other when we don't want to. Love each other when it isn't deserved. Love each other when pride says, “no!” Love each other like the example he set.**

**Where would you and I be if Jesus set the same limitations on his love that we do?**

**When they apologize. When they deserve it. When they are good enough. When they become more loveable. When they have worked hard enough.**

**I hope and pray and hope and pray that never, ever, ever, ever will anyone be able to look at me—and you and this church and the relationships here and wonder about our Christianity—our love for God and our relationship with him. NEVER should anyone wonder what we are doing here—why we are here.**

**Never should anyone wonder if we are truly his.**

**As we serve each other and build each other up and as we love each other no matter what—others will be drawn here to this place and to our Savior. And THAT is why we exist.**

**I think you can see what all this has to do with New Years.**

**Let us resolve to be a shining light in the darkness—guiding others to our Savior.**