



Descending to Serve

One of my favorite flying stories centers around Captain Thompson, a British Airways pilot, who, toward the end of his career, flew passengers around the Scottish isles. It was a time, many decades ago, when airline travel, particularly in small planes, was much less complicated and involved.

The planes Captain Thompson flew at the end of his career were so small they had no partition between the flight deck and the cabin. This arrangement enabled him to occasionally play a practical joke on his passengers. Captain Thompson would board the flight, dressed like any other passenger, and sit with them in the cabin, waiting for the pilot to show up.

When the time for take-off came and passed, inevitably the passengers would get upset, and Captain Thompson would join in. Finally, when everyone was really agitated, Captain Thompson would speak up and say he had read a book about flying, and this plane was so small it surely couldn't be that difficult to fly. He said that if the pilot didn't show up in three minutes he would go ahead and give it a try.

Sure enough, no pilot showed up, so Captain Thompson made his way to the pilot's seat. Whether it was because they were in shock or simply didn't know what to say, most of the time the passengers didn't protest his decision to fly the plane.

After Captain Thompson had successfully taken off, sometimes he would deliberately talk loud enough for the passengers to hear, talking to himself, trying to remind himself about what the book had said about landing.

Who are you following? Where are you going, and what is the purpose of your life? Are you confident that your spiritual airplane has a Pilot who knows what he's doing? Can you trust him to make sure you land safely at your final destination?

Washing the feet of his disciples (John 13:1-9) might be seen as one of the more definitive and epic moments of the ministry of Jesus. The actions Jesus took in washing the feet of his disciples, as recorded in these nine verses, review, rehearse and recap the mission and meaning of his life and ministry.

Jesus was at the table, eating with his disciples. He rose from the table, took off his robe and put on a towel. One might say that this action is somewhat like his incarnation in the very beginning. He came to us from out of eternity, becoming one of us, as God in the flesh.

He descended to serve—his object and his goal and his mission was to serve us. Foot washing was not only an incredible act of humility and service, but it was also the act of Jesus, who was about to die, preparing his disciples to follow him and give their lives to him.

We remember the powerful words of Paul, in Galatians 2:20, describing the spiritual death, burial and resurrection of all Christ-followers:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

As disciples of Jesus, we have been crucified with Christ so that the physical life we now lead we live by faith in the Son of God who loved us to the end. We are Christ-followers. The narrow road we travel is called

The Jesus Way. Throughout the Four Gospels we often read that Jesus said to his disciples, "Follow me."

"Follow me" is the invitation of Jesus—an invitation that connects us intimately with him. It is an invitation that connects us with the great I AM who is truly going somewhere. The act of following Jesus means that we share the same road—we suffer and we serve. In fact, the word often translated "follow" in the four Gospels is rooted in the Greek word for "road."

Our lives, as Christ-followers, are wrapped up in him—our lives are defined by him. He is the center and focus of our lives. Because he is in us and we are in him, we serve others in his name.

Jesus doesn't call us to become brain surgeons or commercial airline pilots. He doesn't expect us to heal others. He doesn't require us to be rocket scientists or world class theologians.

Jesus doesn't presume we will walk on water or multiply a few loaves and fish to feed thousands of people. Jesus doesn't insist that we die on a cross.

Jesus descended into the pig pen we have made of planet earth to be one of us, to love us and serve us so that one day we might ascend with him. Jesus invites us to follow him. Jesus offers us a new life if we allow him to wash our feet.

Jesus invites us to serve others, symbolically washing their feet, in his name. □

—Greg Albrecht

Join us for "Descending to Serve" at the audio teaching ministry of Christianity Without the Religion, the week of November 15, 2020.