

The Day of Fellowship

Sterling UMC
March 29, 2008
John 13:1-17

On September 18, 2007, Carnegie Mellon professor Randy Pausch delivered a one-of-a-kind lecture that made the world stop and pay attention. His lecture entitled, "Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams" became an Internet sensation viewed by millions, an international media story, and a best-selling book that has been published in 35 languages.

It all began with one, age-old question: What would you say if you knew you were going to die and had a chance to sum up everything that was most important to you?

That question had been posed to the annual speaker of a lecture series at Carnegie Mellon University, where Pausch was a computer sciences professor. For Pausch, though, the question wasn't hypothetical.

Pausch, a father of three small children with his wife Jai, had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer -- and given six months to live.

Friends and colleagues flew in from all around the country to attend his last lecture. And -- almost as an afterthought -- the lecture was videotaped and put on the Internet for the few people who couldn't get there that day.

That was all it took. Somehow amid the vast clamor of the Web and the bling-bling of million-dollar budgets, savvy marketing campaigns and millions of strange and bizarre videos, the voice of one earnest professor standing at a podium and talking about his childhood dreams cut through the noise.

The lecture was so uplifting, so funny, so inspirational that it went viral. So far, 10 million people have downloaded it.

In April 2008 his book, *The Last Lecture* written with Jeffrey Zaslow, leaped to the top of the nonfiction best-seller list and remained there nearly six months.

Last October Pausch appeared on *Oprah*, and his audience widened even further. He testified before Congress for better cancer-research funding. He got 10,000 e-mails recommending possible therapies. He spent a day hanging out with the Pittsburgh Steelers, which he'd mentioned as one of his own childhood dreams. ABC News even did a prime-time special on him.

Randy died July 25, 2008, at the age of 47.

Thousands have written in to say that his lecture changed their lives. To this day, people everywhere continue to talk about Randy, share his message and put his life lessons into action in their own lives.

We are in the midst of a series of messages leading up to Easter. We are exploring Jesus' last week. We have been looking at these last seven days of Jesus' life, seeking to follow Jesus on His journey to the cross. As we look at these climatic days we get a clearer understanding of who Jesus is and what he has done for us. And understanding and accepting that can change your life.

Sunday, the crowds cheered Jesus like a king. But Jesus knew the cheers of Sunday would soon give way to jeers and so Sunday the day of triumph became Monday the day of emotion, a day where Jesus wept over Jerusalem and drives the money-changers from the temple. This leads to Tuesday a day of questions, a day in which his enemies sought to trick, trap, and trip him up. They sought to find something they could use to eliminate the threat that Jesus posed to their religious authority. Then last week we looked at Wednesday, the day of transition. A day in which Jesus was apart from the crowd to lay hold of the power that would enable him to turn defeat into victory and death into life.

This brings us to Thursday, the day of fellowship. It is the last full day of Jesus' life. Jesus knew when He entered the upper room that evening that in less than six hours He would be betrayed and arrested. He knew that in twelve hours He would be victim of a mock trial, taken to be ridiculed by King Herod, then back to the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate. He knew that in sixteen hours He would be mocked and whipped by Roman soldiers, and that in seventeen hours He would hear the crowd yelling for Him to be crucified. And, He knew that in eighteen hours He would be nailed to a cross, and in twenty-one hours He would be dead.

And instead of focusing on himself he wants to spend this time with his disciples. These were the men that Jesus had chosen. Each one of them different and unique just like each of us is different and unique.

The problem is that even after three years of living with Jesus, hearing him teach, watching his every action, witnessing his miracles they still don't get it. So Jesus takes this last day, this last evening to gather with the disciples and teach them one final time. To impart to them the most important lessons he wanted them to remember.

You see in essence it was His "Last Lecture." In a real sense this is exactly what Jesus was doing that night in the upper room, delivering a last lecture. But Jesus didn't do it by delivering a long speech. No. He didn't do it so much with words. Jesus did it with actions. His last lecture was a living parable to his disciples and to us about the way he wants us to live and what he wants us to remember.

If he was ever going to imprint his message on their hearts and minds, the time had come. What exactly was that message? Here's a hint: John 13:1 we heard a moment

ago: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love." That's an interesting concept-"the full extent of his love." Just what do you think he did to express the fullness of his love?

As always, Jesus chose two very unconventional ways to get his message across.

First he took off his outer clothing and wrapped a towel around his waist. Then he filled a basin with water and began washing his disciples' feet. Is that it? Was this the last major image Jesus wanted imprinted on his followers' minds? Yes, actually it was. It was an image that they would never forget, an image that would forever shape their identities as followers of Christ. It was an image that would change the world. Jesus Christ, their Master, God in human flesh, the One to Whom every knee will bow and every tongue will confess and yet He takes the role of a servant, puts on a towel, bends down and begins to wash their feet.

Throughout his entire ministry he was trying to impress this upon his disciples. His entire life and ministry was spent looking to the needs of others. Over and over he demonstrated this with acts of love and compassion. Over and over he said things like, "...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Mark 10:43).

"Who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27).

And hear on this last night with those closest to him He gave them one more example. When he had finished washing their feet, he asked them, "Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

I'm sure I don't need to tell you that most people are in the business of "looking out for number one." That was true in Jesus' day and it's definitely true today.

From the moment of birth, people urge others to meet their needs. The infant cries until Mom comes to feed or change her. The toddler misbehaves until Dad stops playing with little sister and gives full attention to him. At older ages siblings often demand privileges in at least equal proportion to, and preferably in greater amounts than, their brothers and sisters. As adults we often seek the highest paying jobs, the most comfortable homes, the most prestigious cars, and the most extravagant vacations possible, and are willing to go to considerable trouble to achieve these ends. What begins as a survival instinct quickly becomes an expression of fallen human nature.

We even see it here in the church. Serve me. Cater to my needs. Wait on me. Do it my way.

We are obsessed with having our own needs met. But Jesus was different. On this His

last night, His last opportunity to share with His disciples, when He knew that He would die in just a few short hours. When it would have been normal for Him to be consumed with His own concerns, He was focused on the needs of His disciples.

That is the message for us this morning. If we call ourselves followers of Jesus Christ we must learn this lesson, servanthood.

Philippians 2:3-8 tells us that we should, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself..."

So on this night of fellowship, in this last lecture, Jesus by His actions showed us that nothing indicates love more clearly than humble service to others. That's the first lesson Jesus leaves with His disciples and with us, servanthood. And the second is like it. Sacrifice.

After Jesus finished washing all of the disciples' feet, He put away the towel, put on His robe, and returned to his place at the table. Then He took a piece of bread and broke it and said, "This is my body which is for you." Next, He took a cup and said, "This is my blood. I pour it out for you." One more act of service would follow—the ultimate act of service: the giving of His life. Just as Jesus poured water into a basin to wash the disciples' dirty feet, He would pour out His blood on the cross to wash our dirty hearts.

Jesus was reminding them that "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

He was giving them a preview as to what was going to take place within the next twelve hours. He was giving them a way to remember Him and the sacrifice He was about to make. He was giving them a way by which every time they broke the bread and drank the cup they would know He would be with them, a way by which His love and fellowship would continue to be real and present, a way by which they could always know the salvation and forgiveness that His broken body and shed blood makes possible.

And He has done the exact same thing for you and me. And so every time we come to a place like this, every time we kneel at an altar like this and take the bread and drink the cup we remember. We remember the lessons He taught. We remember the sacrifice that He made. We experience the fellowship and communion of his living presence. And we encounter the means of grace by which salvation and forgiveness can be ours.

Last Lectures. The wit and wisdom of people like Randy Pausch have the ability to teach us and inspire us here and now. But their impact and influence are only temporary and fleeting. But the message and lessons of servanthood and sacrifice our Savior Jesus Christ are and permanent and eternal. May we learn those lessons, remember them and live them all the days of our lives.