

JOHN 13:1-15 (ESV)

1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. **2** During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, **3** Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, **4** rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. **5** Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. **6** He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" **7** Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." **8** Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." **9** Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" **10** Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." **11** For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

12 When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you?" **13** You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. **14** If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. **15** For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

Maundy Thursday

Tonight we heard in our gospel passage John's description of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples mere hours before his arrest. And it's important for us to understand what an extraordinary thing this was for Jesus to do, particularly in the cultural context of first century Israel. In those days, footwashing as a practice was not uncommon; in fact it was *very common*. And this is because in those days people wore sandals and when they would come in from outside their feet would be very dirty from walking through the streets. Often their feet were caked with not just with dust & mud, but also animal and even *human* waste, since the sewage in those days was tossed into a ditch running down the middle of the street. So typically foot washing almost always done for guests invited to gather at a meal, but it was done before the meal, when people first came in, rather than in the middle of the meal as Jesus did here. But you can imagine that for someone to wash another's feet in those days was *not* a very pleasant task at all. Footwashing was typically assigned to slaves – in particular female slaves – because it was considered such a menial task. But *here* we have *Jesus* – the disciples' rabbi and leader – washing *their* feet. And that's what makes Jesus doing it for his disciples here so extraordinary! To help you appreciate just how extraordinary this was – scholars have not been able to find *any* parallel in ancient literature of a person of superior status voluntarily washing the feet of someone of inferior status. But what makes this all the more extraordinary is that we know Jesus was not just a rabbi, he's God, the son of God – yet here he humbles himself to love and serve in this way.

And yet, John wants us to understand this foot washing as a metaphor for Jesus' entire ministry and mission for the salvation of the world. When John notes in verse 4 how Jesus "rose from supper (and) laid aside his outer garments" this is to be understood as a metaphor for what the Son of God did in becoming human at all. As our passage from Philippians 2 this past Sunday recounted, "though Jesus was in the form of God", he "emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. **8** And (then) being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point

of death, even death on a cross” (v6-8). Jesus laid aside his perfect union with Father in Heaven and took on our broken humanity and suffer for our sakes, in order that we might be saved.

And then the metaphor resumes after Jesus “had washed their feet”, when verse 12 says he put on his outer garments and resumed his place, which represents what happens after Jesus left this world and returned to his place at the right hand of the Father where he was clothed again in glory, as so many scriptures attest.¹

So Jesus washes his disciples’ feet first of all as a metaphor for his work for our salvation that is about to culminate in his death on the cross. As verse 1 of our passage, “Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world.” Then verse 3, “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God...” But then, after he had washed their feet, at the end of verse 12 he said to his disciples, “Do you understand what I have done to you? And of course they didn’t. How could they? For the disciples couldn’t really be prepared for what was about to take place. And neither did they understand the fullness of Jesus’ divine identity. Sure, Peter protested against Jesus as his rabbi washing his feet, but that God himself would do this, would’ve been unimaginable: that God’s heart toward humanity is above all a heart not of power or judgment, but of sacrificial love. As Jesus said in Matthew 20, “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (v28).

And yet it is in light of what Jesus had done for them and was about to do for us all - which the disciples wouldn’t come to understand until *much* later - it is in light of this that Jesus gives his disciples the command to do likewise for each other. In verse 14, he says, “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵*For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.*” If the Son of God’s demeanor toward each one of us has been sacrificial love, then Jesus desires to soften our hearts to love our fellow man in the same manner: in sacrificial love. # # #

So, while we are on this subject of sacrificial love, I want to take this opportunity to say how pleased I have been to see so many of our parishioners responding in sacrificial love toward one another

¹ Acts 7:55–56 “But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. [56] And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” (ESV)

Romans 8:34 “Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. (ESV)

Ephesians 1:20 “that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, (ESV)

Colossians 3:1 “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (ESV)

Hebrews 1:3 “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (ESV)

Hebrews 8:1 “Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, (ESV)

Hebrews 10:12 “But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, (ESV)

Hebrews 12:2 “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (ESV)

1 Peter 3:22 “...who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. (ESV)

Revelation 3:21 “The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. (ESV)

Acts 2:33 “Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. (ESV)

in the weeks since we've been dealing with the pandemic and sheltering in place orders. Whether it's through calling and checking on folks, or ensuring others can get groceries, or finding creative ways to show people you care for them, these acts reflect the hearts of sacrificial love Jesus has called us to have. And for those of you who may feel like you haven't done anything but stay at home, I would say that your willingness to do that, to sacrifice doing the things you may *want* to do in order to be a team player for the common good - is no small thing; and perhaps you feel like you have not choice, but it has certainly cost you. And some of our biggest sacrifices have been the fellowship with one another we're used to.

- I have personally trained a whole lot of you over the last few weeks in the technology of zoom. And beginning next week, many of you will log on, not because it's the way you would *want* to relate to one another - it's far from ideal - but that's a sacrifice you're willing to make for the sake of the Body.

And we are not in a situation where we can administer Holy Communion, and we haven't been able to for awhile now; even on Easter none of you will be able to receive. Instead, you're tuning in remotely, and joining in A Prayer for Spiritual Communion.

However, tonight's focus on footwashing does provide us with the opportunity for a sacramental, tangible exercise that can be done at home. Whether there are others in our household or even if you are alone, you can go grab some towels and a basin and fill it up with water from the tap.

And as I invite you to do this in a few moments, those of you who will wash the feet of others in your home - this obviously won't serve any practical purpose in the way that it did for dinner party guests in the first century. I doubt anyone's feet who will be washed tonight are anywhere near as dirty as their feet would've been. But footwashing is a way for us to demonstrate our desire to love these people as Christ does, but also a plea for God to help us do so.

But as St. John will later write in one of his letters, "We love because he first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). So for any of us who are on the receiving end of footwashing tonight - or if you're alone I would invite you to participate with us by submerging your feet in water or if you just want to meditate on the icon of the footwashing we'll put on the screen - for anyone who takes part in any of these ways, this affords you the opportunity to meditate on what Christ has done for you. So I invite you to imagine Jesus having put aside his outer garment stooping to wash your feet. And asking, "Do you understand what I have done to you? Now let me help you to go and do likewise."

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.



Public Domain https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/87/Omovenie_nog.jpg