

## ***Maundy Thursday sermon***

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*Maundy Thursday is my favorite service because Jesus' consecrates the humble act of foot washing and transforms it into a sacrament+. -- tonight the washing becomes an extension of the Last Supper and of our Eucharist. Feeding someone the bread of heaven is an intimate act. I treasure the different hands I get to touch; old hands with ropey veins, soft hands, little hands, cold hands - when we "keep the feast" we enter into a deeper, mysterious relationship with one another because of Christ's presence.*

*Foot washing is a similar 'sacrament' of intimacy. It is a metaphor about exposing our naked selves to Jesus and to one another. And it requires us to enter into a relationship of shared vulnerability. We come to church, a place of refuge and sanctuary, and strip ourselves of ourselves. We take off our shoes and then our socks or stockings and we risk showing our friends and neighbors our feet.....too big, smelly, bunions, dry skin, nails with fungus, many of us are sensitive about our feet and don't like to expose them. We wash one another's feet not only because Jesus humbled himself to wash his disciples' feet but because by engaging in this action we admit our weaknesses and our need for a connection to a power greater than ourselves. And it is this admission that allows us to come closer to God and to one another. The process of admitting our vulnerability makes us stronger in Christ and connects us more deeply to one another.*

*Participating in the 'sacrament' of foot washing also requires that we give and receive. We don't just wash feet without having ours washed. We participate in both the giving and the receiving; and receiving can be humbling—even humiliating, depending on the circumstances and the attitude of the giver. In*

*our society there is a perceived power in being a giver and a perceived weakness in receiving. We are GIVERS we declare proudly. We don't need charity or help from others - we are self-sufficient. But Jesus uses the cleansing of the disciple's feet as yet another lesson in the importance of treasuring our humanness. To be a genuine giver/a disciple, we must know what it is like to be weak and receive and to let go of our power **and possibly even to let go of our dignity**. Until we know just what it feels like to receive, we cannot be loving givers. And Jesus wants us to understand this lesson.*

*Jesus uses a common practice that the disciples would be familiar with in order to prepare them to receive the ultimate gift of love he will make tomorrow. It is dusty and dirty in the Jerusalem desert and Judeans would walk to their host's for a meal and the lowest servant in the household would wash their feet in an entrance room outside the main body of the house. Jesus, the Son of God as He has been called, lowers himself in performing this ritual of cleansing to show the depth of his love, to declare that **He is the Son of Man**. Jesus chooses to die and He is chosen; He is compelled to die and He willingly offers himself to death And the disciples (exemplified by Peter) do not understand this gift of love.*

*'When Jesus got to Simon Peter, Peter said, "Master, you wash my feet?"*

*Jesus answered, "You don't understand now what I'm doing, but it will be clear enough to you later."*

*Peter persisted, "You're not going to wash my feet—ever!"*

*Jesus said, "If I don't wash you, you can't be part of what I'm doing."*

*"Master!" said Peter. "Not only my feet, then. Wash my hands! Wash my head!"*

*Jesus said, "If you've had a bath in the morning, you only need your feet washed now and you're clean from head to toe. My concern, you understand, is holiness, not hygiene."*

*At first Peter doesn't want to receive this act of humility from Jesus and then he wants everything cleansed; he wants to make a new start. But Jesus denies Peter this time by reminding him that he is already clean - acceptable as he is - and that the gift of foot washing is about love.*

*Jesus declares his love for us with his words, by humbling himself to the level of the lowest servant, and by willingly dying for us. If we start saying, "I didn't ask him to die for me and I am definitely not worthy of it" then we have not comprehended Jesus' message. His life, his words, and his actions were about living in love and being love, NOT about the worthiness of the people he loves.*

*We are not worthy to untie Jesus sandal, much less wash his feet, much less have Him wash our feet. Yet He acts out of love for us.*

*We who are self conscious about our feet++ are putting ourselves at the center of this 'sacrament' and are not receiving Jesus' whole invitation - to serve and be served; to love and to accept love; to feel unworthy and ask for God's grace that we may overcome our sense of unworthiness and go out and love anyway.*

*As that great murder mystery writer and Anglican, PD James writes; "The world is a beautiful and terrible place. Deeds of horror are committed every minute and in the end those we love die. If the screams of all earth's living creatures were one scream of pain, surely it would shake the stars. But we have love. It may seem a frail defence against the horrors of the world but we must hold*

*fast and believe in it, for it is all that we have." (The Private Patient, page 352)*

*Just as you boldly accept Jesus' body at the altar rail, tonight your response to Jesus' wild and extravagant love can be to enter into the holy 'sacrament' of having your feet washed.*

*Amen.*

*+The Latin word **sacramentum** means "a sign of the sacred." The seven sacraments are ceremonies that point to what is sacred, significant and important for Christians. They are special occasions for experiencing God's saving presence. That's what theologians mean when they say that sacraments are at the same time **signs** and **instruments** of God's grace. The seven sacraments are:*

*Baptism  
Eucharist  
Reconciliation  
Confirmation  
Marriage  
Holy Orders  
Anointing of the Sick*

*++As St. Symeon, The New Theologian who lived over 1000 years ago wrote (Hymns of Divine Love):*

*'We awaken in Christ's body  
as Christ awakens our bodies,  
and my poor hand is Christ, He enters  
my foot, and is infinitely me.*

*I move my hand, and wonderfully  
my hand becomes Christ, becomes all of Him  
(for God is indivisibly  
whole, seamless in His Godhood).*

*I move my foot, and at once  
He appears like a flash of lightning.  
Do my words seem blasphemous? -- Then  
open your heart to Him*

*and let yourself receive the one*

*who is opening to you so deeply.  
For if we genuinely love Him,  
we wake up inside Christ's body  
where all our body, all over,  
every most hidden part of it,  
is realized in joy as Him,  
and He makes us, utterly, real,*

*and everything that is hurt, everything  
that seemed to us dark, harsh, shameful,  
maimed, ugly, irreparably  
damaged, is in Him transformed*

*and recognized as whole, as lovely,  
and radiant in His light  
he awakens as the Beloved  
in every last part of our body.'*