



What is it about washing feet that is so uncomfortable for us? We will do a lot to not have to take off our shoes and socks and expose our feet to one another. We are vulnerable when we are barefoot. Our feet are not often the prettiest part of our physical body but they are necessary to standing upright and walking. Feet are necessary to our balance.

Being barefoot connects us to the earth- to grass or to dirt or to sand on the beach- in ways that wearing shoes does not. Perhaps that is one reason that God told Moses to

take off his sandals when standing on holy ground. Because all of creation comes from God, perhaps this is one reason we are hesitant to take off our shoes even to have our feet washed. We are vulnerable. It may be that we can't escape God as easily as we can (or so we think) when we have good running shoes on.

Beyond being barefoot, though, the washing of feet by someone we know changes our relationship to them. We are open to the person washing our feet in ways that defy our normal social discourse and relationships. It's hard to be distant from someone who has washed your feet.

That may be part of what Jesus was after as he washed feet and reminded the disciples of the great commandments: Love God and love neighbor. Indeed, love God and love your neighbor as yourself. Extend your love and care for yourself to every other living creature and to all of creation. We are all connected in ways too many to count. We are all connected at levels we try to avoid acknowledging because it is hard to walk away from those with whom you are connected.

Tonight Jesus reminds us that we do not have to be a traditional leader in terms of being the one in the room elected to office or wealthy or possessed of attributes the world holds up as important. Each of us has gifts and talents that are to be used to lift up all of creation as good and indeed very good.

Tonight symbolizes more than the actual washing of feet. It asks us to consider what in our lives we hold as more valuable than being a servant of God. It asks us to consider where we are vulnerable and whether that feeling of vulnerability can be used to usher in the kingdom of God.

The disciples that night were just like us. Put something out of the norm before us and we back away. "Not me, Lord; you will never wash my feet." And Jesus reminds us that this is exactly what is necessary.

Push out our boundaries of safe and expected behavior. Be radical and welcome all- even the ones with dusty or dirty feet. Where are the barriers between you and God that need to be broken down so that you can walk on holy ground with bare feet?

Morton Kelsey tells of flying home from a conference and passing over the home of his estranged brother, over the home of his estranged father and on his way to see his estranged daughter. From 30,000 feet it came to him that the estrangements were of his making: that he had pushed away his family when they failed to meet his needs in the ways in which he wanted those needs met. Kelsey explains that during that flight he began to realize that he had been “much more interested in receiving consolation and love than in giving them. If someone did not give him what he needed, he believed the relationship had failed. He realized that emotional and spiritual maturity begins when we give love without expecting anything in return. Only when we forgive status, reverse roles and wash each other’s feet; only when we forsake ambition, pride and greed and give ourselves in acts of unselfish love can we experience a life that is whole and holy.”<sup>1</sup>

Maundy Thursday prepares us for Good Friday. “After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord--and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.”

Jesus did a simple thing by washing of dusty feet that night. He did a profound thing in reminding us that what God desires of us- to love our neighbor as ourself, to visit the sick and the lonely, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to remember that all that God created is good and worthy of love and respect- is within our abilities regardless of whether we have wealth or status in our daily life – it is all possible due to God’s overwhelming grace.

Go, therefore, into the world to love and serve God. Know that God’s grace surrounds you even as God calls you to expand your boundaries and to see in the washing of feet how we are cleansed to walk on holy ground. **Amen.**

---

<sup>1</sup> John H. Westerhoff III. A Pilgrim People (New York: Church Publishing, 2005) 15.