

Most of you are probably familiar with this text being read on Maundy Thursday. Many congregations even have a tradition of foot washing during that Maundy Thursday service. John tells us that this dinner party happens just before the festival of Passover, and it is the beginning of the Passion narrative. John informs us the audience that it's at this time that Jesus knew that his hour had come; the hour where his glory would be revealed publicly, through his crucifixion and death. For John, we have now gotten to the important part. All that has come before has led to this time in Jesus life, the series of events in Jerusalem that will bring about the glory of God. And what are the words that John uses to describe Jesus's state of mind that set these events in motion? Not, "Jesus steeled his resolve, facing the inevitable with courage", or something similar to that. No, Jesus enters into this entire Passion Narrative with love. John says, "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end".

In the ancient world, the act of foot washing was a commonplace activity. When you entered as a guest into a house, especially if you were going to be eating, you would wash the dust and debris from the outside world off to keep anything from infecting the food. Most commonly the host would provide a basin of water and the people coming into the house would wash their own feet. In parts of the world today, where there is no running water, this is still a common practice for hand washing. There are two basins of water, one for washing with soap, and one for pouring out to rinse. When you gather for a meal, there is always water for washing.

In Jesus time, if the host was wealthy enough to have servants, it might be them who washed the feet of the guests. Hardly ever though would a "free" person wash the feet of another "free" person. The only exception to this would be as a sign of extreme devotion by

the person washing to the person being washed. So immediately in the action of washing feet by Jesus upon the disciples, we are thrust into a circumstance where he is breaking all of the expectations of social order. As modern readers we don't really experience the shock of this event that John's first readers did, or even the shock that the disciples felt. The protesting words of Simon Peter gives us an idea, "Lord, are *you* going to wash my feet? You will never wash my feet!" I imagine Simon Peter standing up as he says this, maybe even trying to push the basin out of the way or walking to the other side of the table. The audacity of their teacher, the man whom they believe is the Messiah, washing their feet is incredible. It would never happen. That is slaves work, not the work of a man of respect.

We don't understand these nuances of this event, because in the western world we have not had this practice for a very long time. The closest thing that we have is when we maybe go to the nail salon and get a pedicure. We go and we pay for someone to massage and care for our feet. But when we do this we pay for this service from a stranger, someone who we don't know, someone who won't care that while we sit in that fancy chair that will massage our back for us, we might fall asleep. In our modern times, this only common instance where there is foot washing has become an extremely passive and cool act, one that is merely a service being provided. Even when we participate as a worshiping community in a foot washing on Maundy Thursday, it has become more of a symbol representing a particular part of the Passion narrative rather than a radical act of our Christian community.

Christ is our example in this beloved community that we are part of. We gather as Disciples in fellowship, we gather as Disciples in worship, we gather as Disciples in mission. We gather together as Disciples of Christ, who are loved, even until the end. But we are not

called to passively sit here next to each other each and every Sunday morning, waiting for the cleansing of our feet by Jesus. Yes, Jesus loves us and has washed us all in the redeeming waters of baptism and washes us still when we gather to eat from his table for communion. But in that upper room, around that table, Jesus gave his disciples a command. "Do as I have done. Wash one another's feet."

Brothers and sisters, Jesus calls us to not only enter that intimate space with him, but to enter that space with one another. The radical love that he showed for us, acting as a slave who washes our dirty feet, a slave that eventually gave up his life, is what we are to emulate with one another. Christ asks us, "Do you know what I have done for you?" Like the disciples, we call him teacher and Lord, and that is what he is. So if we call him our Teacher and Lord, and he is the one who has broken the taboos of social expectation, so too are we called to give up those expectations. As those freed in Christ, we are to give up all that that freedom provides and become like slaves; giving up of ourselves for those others who are around us; giving up our positions of power and authority to serve our neighbor; giving up the comfort of space and passivity, to get down on our knees for the ones whom we are called to love.

That giving up happens here, in this place of worship. The people sitting here with you are the ones that sit with you around Christ's table. Everyone who walks through the doors of this church have dirty feet. All of us. Feet that are filthy from walking through the dust and debris of this world we live in. Our dirty feet need washing. And we are called by Christ to grab that bucket of water and towel and wash the feet of the person that comes through the door after us. It means we have to get close to each other and know each other. Because

when we as Disciples of Christ wash the feet of others, we are called to do it with the same radical love that Jesus shows to us.

So let's start that this morning. Dirty footed person to dirty footed person. Turn to someone near you and say.

"I will strive to enter that intimate space of Christ's radical love with you."

Now, turn to someone else and say it again.

"I will strive to enter that intimate space of Christ's radical love with you."

Repeat this over and over again in your life. There are slips of paper with this prayer on it. Take one. Take ten if you need them. Put it on your bathroom mirror, use it as a marker in your bible or in the pew hymnal. Be continually reminded of Christ's call to us; to love one another, and to wash one another's feet, as he has done for us.