

Meditation for Maundy Thursday, 2011

If you knew you were going to die in under a week, wouldn't you prioritize and take care of the really important things? In John's Gospel, that means, for Jesus, taking time to wash his disciples' feet.

Some years ago Alyce M. McKenzie decided to go to a foot washing at a Maundy Thursday service. It was the first one this church had ever tried, and probably the last. The pastor had the secretary call down the list of parish leaders trying to get twelve people to agree to sit in a row up front that night and let the pastor wash their feet. She was turned down six times. She got discouraged and ended up settling for half a dozen pair of feet up front instead of twelve.

That evening, as the sun set and the moon rose gleaming through the stained glass scene of Jesus in the Garden behind the altar, there they sat up front, in a line of folding chairs facing the congregation, with their shoes neatly lined up next to each of their chairs like little soldiers. There was Joyce (not our warden) up there on the end seat. She had had a pedicure just for the occasion. Everyone could see her bright coral nail polish. One could see Ralph's "gold toe" socks neatly folded on top of his newly polished wing tip shoes. You could smell a hint of Fabreeze that Denise must have sprayed in her shoes just before she left home. The congregation got to watch while the pastor washed the six best smelling pairs of feet in the entire town. In her fond memories of that evening, Alyce thinks of it as the "Demo Foot Washing."

John's alone of the gospels has the foot washing. Why? Well, as John's Jesus explains, it is to set an example for us of service to others.

But I don't think John wants us to sit in the congregation this Maundy Thursday and watch Jesus wash some other people's feet and say, "Isn't Jesus a thoughtful person? We ought to be doing things like that in our church."

This text is not about watching Jesus put his hands on somebody else's feet. It's about letting Jesus put his hands on our feet. Not all of us want that. One reason maybe is that

we're embarrassed about our feet. It's not as if we as the church of Jesus Christ are a foot model convention. As we get older, we may one day look down at our feet and say to ourselves, "Whose veiny, bulbous, knobby feet are those? And how did they get on the end of my ankles?"

A deeper reason we don't want Jesus handling our feet is because to allow Jesus to touch our feet is to allow him to touch our will. We all have a mind; we all have emotions; and we all have a will—our decision making power. Our feet are how we put our decisions in motion and get places, do things. We can think about doing something. "I think I'll go to her father's memorial service out of respect for her." We can feel we ought to do something. "I have a feeling it would be a good thing to do." But if we are going to actually show up and walk up to her afterward and offer a comforting embrace, our feet have to be involved.

To allow Jesus to cleanse our feet is to remove all that prevents us from using our feet to follow him—to scrub away our insecurities, to wash away our weariness, to buff off our bitterness.

And then our feet are refreshed to do what feet in scripture, were meant to do. Follow God.

In the Exodus story God says:

- "This is how you shall eat the Passover lamb: with your loins girded, your staff in your hand, and your sandals on your feet" (Ex. 12:11). In others words, be ready to move out to follow Moses out of this place of bondage and into the Promised Land. Be ready to use your feet!
- "Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet and a light to my path" (Ps. 119:105).
- "You have delivered my soul from death, my feet from stumbling; I walk before the Lord in the land of the living" (Ps. 116: 8-9).

Our text tonight is our chance to allow Jesus to cleanse our feet so we can follow him. If we don't allow him to cleanse our feet, our story with him stops now. The week goes on,

but we have chosen darkness rather than light. Jesus' words to Peter are also addressed to us: "Unless I wash you, you have no share in me" (Jn. 13:8).

Not everybody in this story wants Jesus' hands on their feet. Peter didn't. Pilate didn't. Pilate chose to use his feet to pace about his palace, back and forth in front of his medicine cabinet, searching for some salve for his sore conscience. Peter chose to use his feet to stand by a fire warming himself while denying his Lord.

How will we use our feet to deny or serve the Risen Christ.?"