

Maundy Thursday
St. John 13: 1-17; 31b-35
April 9th, 2017
St. George's Church Bolton
Fr. Chris

Feet

"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

There is something very humbling about caring for the feet of another. I am more reluctant to have my feet washed at the foot washing ceremony on Maundy Thursday, than I am washing the feet of others. I guess the role of being a servant seems easier, more comfortable, than exposing your soiled or sweaty feet to be washed by another. Yet there remain many who would be repelled by the thought of being a foot washer. Consider the disdain many would have toward people who care for feet in nursing homes. These represent a cast of people, having low paying jobs with little respect from the rest of the world, performing a most humble and necessary service of cleaning our loved ones, including their soiled and worn feet.

Jesus gives us a new commandment tonight, as he washes the feet of his disciples: *"by my example, do as I have done for you."* What he has done is humble service. Jesus makes no claim to be served, but shows how he has come to serve us, and love us in His service. Few things can be more humbling than to wash another's feet, so by God's own example, no

service is too humble to give in caring for another. Do unto others, as you would have them do to you. Do unto others as I have done to you. *A new golden rule!*

And that is what tonight's liturgy is all about: *a new commandment*. In Latin, *mandatum*, hence the name, "Maundy Thursday. And the new commandment? As we heard in the Gospel this evening, [John 13: 34]: "*A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another.*" To love someone is to serve them quietly, lovingly, without begrudging the service of the person, but celebrating the privilege and honor it is to serve others, most of whom are more deserving of the service than you. Peter did not feel worthy to have the Lord wash his feet and declined to allow him to do so twice. Sometimes it is a blessing to allow others to serve you, and in particular, to be quiet and still and to allow God to serve you. If we want to love others, we must allow others to love us and bless us with their care and concern, whether we feel edgy and uncomfortable, or not.

I have a lot of trouble with this one. I can hear myself protesting as much and then some as did Peter, were I given the privilege of sitting at table with Jesus. I have always felt uncomfortable being served by others, *even in a restaurant!* I feel embarrassed and undeserving of such attention, the better and more attentive it is. I am more at home in the role of servant, I must admit.

A psychiatrist might say I have *self esteem* issues. I feel uneasy because I don't feel others were created to serve me. At a very deep level though, service to another is a way we show our love to them, a way to share God's love. Maybe I need to learn to let a little of that love back in my own life, letting others reflect love to and for me. Jesus is very firm about

having us allow our peers to serve us and wash our feet, *just as clear as* he is about us washing the feet of others. You have to learn to be prepared to *both give and receive service and love* from and to others, especially from God.

Our feet give us independence. They enable us to move around and do what we need to do to sustain ourselves. Feet are so much more than mere transportation. They are also our main contact point with the solid ground beneath each us, the earth, God's creation, our island home. They connect us to our environment. With our feet standing on solid ground, it gives us a feeling of security.

Feet. In the summer, there is nothing more comfortable and no feeling more exquisite than that of your feet and toes relishing the fine wet sand at the edge of the shore on the beach. But we can also feel the heat of hot pavement or sidewalks beneath them, especially if the soles of our shoes have worn thin or were substandard in the first place. At night, when we remove our shoes, sometimes there are blisters or other injuries from the hard work we have put them through. Too many people in the world lack adequate footwear, a thought to peruse when we gaze upon the collection of our own shoes, much of which, if yours is like mine, goes unused much of the time.

Remember footmen like those in *Downton Abby*? Footmen were originally practical servants who ran alongside the carriages of wealthy aristocrats, like secret service agents, except their role was to remove fallen tree limbs and other barriers to the safe progress of the carriage. Later they came to serve a rather less essential, more decorative role, standing behind the chairs of dinner guests to tend to their needs. They did not do any of the heavy lifting, which was done by

cooks, maids and even butlers. They were window dressing to show off one's wealth. The more footmen you had, the wealthier you were. The poorer classes iteration of this was judged by the size of their collection of shoes. *[which practice remains to this day]*

But...God calls us to be footmen too! We are to run through life, clearing the way of obstructions. "Make straight in the desert a highway for our God." *"Every Valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth."* These are words you may recall from Advent each year. Well here they are on Maundy Thursday.

As we age, it becomes necessary for some to seek such help in caring for their feet. I am well acquainted with the ministrations of the podiatrist, who can help hurting feet be restored to health. I have watched people who have received such a treatment and I am impressed by the genuine relief that they feel. The healing of tired feet begins with the ministration tonight of Jesus.

I must confess that at the urging of my best friend, I went to have several pedicures at a local salon. Ed was a regular and enjoyed the experience of being pampered while getting your feet washed, sanded, and the nails carefully clipped, while sitting in a massage chair with your feet resting in a small whirlpool. It was a luxurious indulgence I could not justify for myself on a regular basis. I remember being concerned about how humbling it was for the woman who did the pedicure, although well paid, to sit on her knees while she performed this humbling task. I honestly felt that someone should be caring for her feet, after a long day standing and kneeling at the salon. This feeling made me feel a little uneasy, a little

guilty, *(doesn't take much)* and certainly undeserving of such attention and care, and I say that without any false humility on my part. I suspect this was the emotion in the room that Peter and the other disciples felt as Jesus went about the "upper room" during the Last Supper gathering, washing their feet. We can guess this from Peter's response:

"He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus replied, 'You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' 'No,' said Peter, 'you shall never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.' 'Then, Lord,' Simon Peter replied, 'not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!' Jesus answered, 'Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.'"

We are God's foot soldiers. *Foot soldiers* are the basic army infantryman. It is a humble position, but an honorable one. These are the ones who are on the front lines of the battle. These are the forces that help win the battle and make a difference with their courage. Think of those words as they apply to us as God's foot soldiers. Humble. Honorable. Loyal. Serving on the front lines of ministry. Taking the battle for justice and good to the people, and making a difference by the courage of their convictions.

The new commandment tonight is to serve one another, without any reluctance or hesitation, but with love and care. And we are to use the example of God who came among us and served us. If God can be humble, so can we. AMEN.