

Maundy Thursday A April 09 2020
John 13:1-17,31b-35
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth
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Grace and peace to you Dear Saints from God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, eternally. Amen. *Peter said to him [Jesus], "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me"* (John 13:8). Let's pray: Dear Jesus, we, like Peter, are incredulous that you would kneel to wash our feet. And yet, you did at our baptism and continue to do so every day. Help us to accept that we are forgiven for your sake, and as such, we are freed to show others the life-renewing power of your love. Amen.

"You will never wash my feet." Peter knows that servants wash the feet of their master. Masters don't wash the feet of their servants. Teachers don't sit at the feet of their students. Employers don't serve employees. And the Messiah, definitely doesn't touch the feet of disciples.

Peter's world is structured by domination, power, and hierarchy. Foot washing reveals the social pecking order. It's usually done by slaves, children, and women; those who have no standing in society. The lower class "primp and preen" the upper class. Aren't you glad you don't live in 1st Century Palestine?!? Well... our world is not that dissimilar to Peter's. Those who have power, wealth, influence, privilege, status are washed. Those who don't are the washers.

But tonight, is different. This foot washing is different. Once again, Jesus will break the "rules" and the social order will be turned upside down. In the middle of supper, Jesus will get up from the table, remove his outer robe, tie a towel around his waist, pour water into a basin, and begin to wash the disciples' feet.

Turmoil fills the room. Peter's world is being transformed and he doesn't like it. He doesn't understand it. He wants to maintain the status quo. Think about our own situation. Less than three weeks ago, we gathered for worship, and met afterward, deciding to continue worshipping until

otherwise notified. That very night, the PM pulled the plug. Things are changing by the hour and we struggle to understand it. We don't like it. Even when it's for our own good we resist, get angry, and fight back. At a minimum we grumble under our breath or vent to a trusted friend.

"You will never wash my feet," Peter says exasperatedly. "I'm hanging on to what I know, to what I have, to what I can conceive. I don't want you messing with my world, Jesus." Today, we are no different. In the church we might say something like – "But, we've always done it this way. We've never done anything like this before and we're not really interested in starting now." And that's just our pastor! Please enjoy a giggle at my expense.

Jesus continually sets before us example after example of what God's life in the world looks like. And for Peter it looks like nothing he has ever seen or done before. We can say the same. COVID-19 is certainly reordering our priorities and the way we see our world. For Peter, it looks like a basin of water and bare, grubby feet. For us, it looks like reaching out to others we've never met, in ways we never have.

I'm wondering if there's an ulterior motive behind Peter's reaction. "You will never wash my feet." Never is a very long time. I wonder if, in the back of his mind Peter is thinking, "If this is how the Messiah acts, what will be expected of the Messiah's disciples? Whose feet might I be asked to wash for the love of Christ?" The answer of course is, "Everyone's!"

Later, Jesus says, "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." Jesus sets before us an example of love. With this, he washes away the old ways of domination and hierarchy. He replaces them with communion and love. There are no feet excluded from Jesus' love. There are no feet unworthy of being washed. Jesus even washes his betrayer's feet.

Think of all the feet that pass through our lives in a day, a month, a year, a lifetime. What have we done with those feet? What will we do with them? Some we'll ignore. Some we'll tread on. Others we'll receive into our life.

So many feet. Young, old, tired, lost, angry, hurt. There are all sorts of feet. Feet that walk through the muck of life. Feet that trespass into places they shouldn't go. Feet that stand on holy ground. Feet that carry the message of good news. Feet that dance to a different beat or walk a path very different from ours.

Yet, these are the very feet Jesus washes. They are the feet of the world. They are the ones he commands us to wash. They are no different from our own feet. We too walk through the muck of life. Our feet trespass into places they shouldn't go. Our feet stand on holy ground. Our feet carry the message of good news. Our feet sometimes walk a unique, if not strange, path.

But friends, it's not about toes, ankles, and heels. It's about the life of God in this world. Somehow through the mystery of receiving and washing the world's feet, we move from being spectators of Jesus' life to participants in Jesus' life. To distance ourselves from one another's needs is to distance ourselves from Jesus. And the world desperately needs both now. The world needs Jesus, and the world needs you, his foot washers, to show others the way to be made clean as you have been made clean.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, although COVID-19 is disrupting the way the world functions, it's not painting the town red. Jesus' crucifixion on the other hand, painted the whole world red. And he left his followers a charter: "Love one another." Love has outlasted every war, pestilence, and plague, all the while growing God's church through thick and thin. So, grab a basin, some soapy water and a towel, and get ready. There'll be plenty to do. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.