

Sermon 3/1/26 John 13:1-17

“Never, Ever, EVER...”

Well, how are you all doing, here on the Second Sunday of Lent? Lent, a time for reflecting on the stuff we find in the bottom of our pockets, when we turn our socks inside out, or when we clean the screen on our clothes dryer. . Oh, wait...that's *lint!* My mistake.

Lent is the 40 day period of time between Ash Wednesday and Easter when we intentionally turn our gaze inward, paying attention to the interior landscape of our hearts and spiritual journey. A week and a half ago we marked you with ashes on our foreheads or the back of our hands with the words “from dust you came, and to dust you will return”. Remembering our mortality is a good place to start on this journey with God’s Son, Jesus.

And then last Sunday the youth group opened up the First Sunday of Lent with the story of Lazarus being brought back from the dead. Thank you, youth, that was amazing! I think we all were moved and encouraged by your energy and talent and willingness to inspire us all with your insight, music, storytelling, reading Scripture, drama, the sermon, and ushering—even young Wyatt got to make his debut as an usher. You really remind us that you are not just the church of the future, you ARE the church, RIGHT HERE AND NOW! And thank you Elly, for the time you invested in preparing a quite inspiring sermon in the last stretch of your busy senior year! And thanks to your sponsors who took this on and helped get it organized.

So here we are this second Sunday of Lent still in the 4th Gospel, John. In case you don’t recall, we’ll be sticking with John’s Gospel and the Narrative Lectionary right up through Easter. And then Pastor Lois and I will be switching it up; the plan after that will be revealed at a later time. Stay tuned...

So the writer John, who many bible scholars conclude is the “disciple Jesus loved” in this book that bears his name, has taken the first 12 chapters to cover the nearly 3 years of Jesus ministry. In today's text from chapter 13 and the next 5 chapters, time slows waaay down. The next 5 chapters are about 1 night! Clearly, John wants us to slow down and consider the intricacies of what all is transpiring here.

There is no last supper in John, *pe se*, at least not in the way of the other synoptic gospels—no symbolic breaking of bread and drinking the cup that gets highlighted like in the other gospels (except Judas). The night begins with Jesus, during the meal, suddenly getting up and beginning to wash the dirty, sweaty feet of his friends.

Now you have all most likely heard this described as a necessary part of life then in Jesus' time because everyone wore open toe sandals or simply walked around in their bare feet, and most transportation was on their own two feet on the dusty dirty roads and paths that were often walked with animals. Those of us have grown up in the country or on farms—I don't need to tell you what all is in that dust, and what all gets stepped in when you are following animals around.

At the dairy farm where I grew up we ran bare-footed all summer long. There is a long steep ridge that runs parallel to the farm. It was too steep to farm, so the ridge was pasture. The hill was steep enough that those old holsteins wouldn't walk it straight up, but they would angle slowly the full length of the pasture to get to the good grass on the sort of flat top of the ridge. And those of you who have been around cows know that they walk the same path when they have a destination in mind. And those cows cut a path into that hill that was only maybe a foot wide, but pretty much level compared to the hill around it that was as steep as an 8/12 pitch roof. We kids loved to walk those paths too, but you had to be paying attention to where you stepped. And with your bare feet...you might find a fresh cow pie now and then.

Yeah, our feet needed a good cleaning at the end of the day for sure. I recall mom making us wash our feet before we set foot in the house for dinner, and we washed our feet in an old oil drain pan by the outdoor hydrant that we always tried to keep water in so that it wasn't ice cold to wash your feet in. Yes, the people of Jesus day shared the roads with animals, so there were lots of reasons to wash feet at mealtimes.

Craig Koester, in his commentary on this passage, says that in Jesus' day in both the Jewish world and the Greco-Roman world most people would have washed their own feet. If they were a little more well-off, they would have had a servant wash their feet, and the feet of guests. Occasionally, in a sign of radical devotion, a person would wash the feet of someone of

equal status. But NEVER would someone of higher status wash the feet of someone of lesser status.

But Jesus is not like most people. Jesus, perhaps still smelling of perfume that, a chapter earlier his friend Mary had poured out onto his feet in that extravagant display of pure love and devotion after he had raised her brother Lazarus to life, wants to give the disciples a taste of this great love.

So with his own feet and spine perhaps still tingling with this radical display of devotion and love that also served as a symbolic pre-anointing for his own burial, is slowly making his way around the table with a basin and towel, quietly washing the crud off of the feet of his disciples. John doesn't give us much of a sense of how they were all receiving this, but I have a hunch they may have been glancing at the door. We can imagine the affront this would have been to their hierarchical way of thinking. And remember Judas is still in the room—he has already made a deal to betray him. But no-one dared to speak a word, all complying silently even if their brains were screaming “this is all so messed up!”. That is, until he gets to Peter. Peter flinches.

“Are *you* also going to wash *my* feet?” Peter spits out. Jesus breaks his own silence with “you will understand later. For now, let me wash your feet.”

“Are you kidding?” Peter says. Never, ever, EVER (Taylor Swift song lyric). You are the Rabbi, I am the student. You are the master, I am the one who should be serving you!” to which Jesus responds “Unless I wash you, You won't have a place with me”. I imagine there was a pause here. And then practically jumping into the basin Peter says “ok then, if that's the case, wash my hands and my head too!”. I imagine Peter slamming his feet into the basin, splashing water all over the place. Leave it to Peter, always having to make a splash..

“Those who have bathed need only to have their feet washed, because the rest of you is already clean”, Jesus responds. Simmer down, Peter.

I asked Chase Flaming, Denise Duerksen, and Gary Lyndaker to spend time reading and sitting with this passage this week, and then reflect on the question “What does it mean to me to have Jesus wash my feet?” I invite the three of you to come on up and have a seat at the table. You know

there are probably 150 of us here this morning, and there are probably 150 ways that we would answer this question. But I thought this may be a good way to hear more than just the preacher's perspective on this!

When I think of Jesus washing my feet..I feel a burden of shame lifted. Jesus is familiar with every part of my life journey. There are times when I find myself wallowing in head-down shame, remembering the many mistakes I have made, or things I am not proud of. If I can, in the midst of this--what Brene Brown calls a "Shame Storm"--catch myself and imagine Jesus gently washing my feet and saying "hey, look at me. Look up at me. I love you. I am not repulsed by your feet, nor am I repulsed in any way by your shame and brokenness". When I can hear this, the burden of shame begins to lift, and I am able to be gentle and less critical and less judgemental of myself. And then I am in a position to begin to see that my brokenness can in fact, be a source of strength.

Life can be messy, huh? We walk through a lot of crap in our lives and some of it sticks to us. Disappointments. Careers that ended abruptly. Dreams that get shattered. Our health fails us. An illness that changes everything. An accident. Divorce. Loss of a spouse to death. Harsh words that cut deeply. Friendships that falter and never recover.

Sometimes the dirt that sticks to our feet and weighs us down is a result of choices we've made, or the choices of others. Other times just the randomness of life. We get stuff on us. Our feet pick up a lot of crud in this journey of life. It can weigh us down, like when we walk in a muddy field and our feet are twice as heavy as they ordinarily are.

Willard Swartley, in his commentary on John, and this footwashing story, hears an echo of baptism. The disciples would have been baptised by John the Baptist, or by Jesus himself. Like many of us, they had said their initial YES to God and YES to their faith community and were baptized, and began a life of learning and growing and walking with Jesus.

And we, like the disciples, may need our feet washed, on occasion, an "upside down baptism" or a baptism from the bottom up to cleanse us from the stuff that sticks to us, metaphorically, as we walk this road of life. Not to remove or erase those difficult experiences--those are what make us who

we are and can be a great source of strength and character. But to remove the burden of shame that weighs us down. Jesus says we don't need to be dunked again, or water poured or sprinkled on our head—just an upside down washing, or reinstating of our baptism if you will. Maybe a good metaphorical cleansing of the part of us that makes the most contact with the earth we inhabit may be just what is needed as we walk these dusty, muddy, and sometimes crappy roads of life.

When I was a student in the CPE program (clinical pastoral experience) at Wesley one of the other interns told the story of a woman who was actively dying who happened to be Native American, or First Nations. Another First Nations person who came to visit was rubbing her swollen, worn out feet and kept repeating over and over “you have walked many miles, my friend” as the patient breathed her last. I understand that in some tribes this is sort of an end of life ritual that gives the person dying permission to let go, and enables the person offering it to release them. Isn't that a beautiful gesture? Someone rubbing our feet, the part of us that makes the most contact with the rough and messy terrain of our lives.

Jesus finishes washing the feet of his disciples and sits back at the table and acknowledges that he has broken protocol. He has done so as an example for them to follow. Remember, Judas is still in the room! In a room in which evil is present and operative, Jesus washes even Judas' feet. This self-giving love is not just for those who are his friends, but even for those who he knows are on the side of evil. If we ever need this example, it is now, don't you think?

There is so much more that could be said about this passage. But we are slowing way down, remember? What I am most interested in for this Sunday is getting us thinking about our own reactions to the thought of Jesus, God, the Creator, the Supreme Power and Presence behind and in all things--stooping to wash *our* feet! What thoughts and emotions does that bring up for you and I? All mighty, all powerful, all knowing God of all time and place...with tender love and kindness gently washing your feet. I don't know about you, but I have walked through some pretty crappy experiences in life. Can we think of God not being repelled or repulsed by our sin and shame, but rather, moving *toward* you and I in our brokenness? How does that begin to change you to think of God, who many of us grew up thinking of as the angry policeman in the sky, gently and knowingly

washing the crud of shame off of your feet? What does that begin to change about how we view ourselves?

Commentator Meda Stamper writes about footwashing “How hard it can be to accept that we are Jesus’ own, that we are already clean, and then to accept that we are always with him and he with us and that God continues to cleanse even the parts of us that we consider most unworthy of God’s gaze, the less lovely parts we’d prefer to hide away under layers of our best selves. But God who sends light into the impenetrable darkness of the world is certainly not daunted by our small brokenness, and love is the best answer to every hurting stinky thing in the world. It is God’s answer and Jesus’ answer, and it is to be ours”.

May it be so in us this week as we continue on this journey to the cross, this Lenten journey.

The Working Preacher, Narrative Lectionary [NL308: Jesus Washes Feet](#)

The Believer’s Church Bible Commentary, JOHN, Willard M. Swartley
2013