

Sermon for July 25, 2021

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Imagine for a moment that I announced right now I was going to go into the back room and bring out a large basin of water and set it at the base of the stairs. Now imagine I proceed to announce that I am going to come out into the pews and select one of you at a time to come forward and sit on the steps. Once you are seated the plan will be for me to take off your shoes, remove your socks if you have any on, lower one of your feet into the basin of water, and wash your foot with my bare hands.

Anyone getting nervous out there that that might actually be my plan? Anyone suddenly feeling the urge to slip out to the washroom? Wishing you were on Zoom instead of in person? How would it feel to have your feet washed by someone in this space?

I have to say that if someone told me they were going to wash my feet my immediate response would be to reassure them they didn't need to; I would happily do it on my own. There is vulnerability to feet washing. What if my feet smell? What if I have warts or callouses? My feet aren't beautiful. I know I would want to quickly go wash my feet, trim and paint my nails before handing over a foot, to present a more polished impression. If you wash my feet, you might see a stinky, unperfected, broken part of me. We struggle to make these parts visible to one another, to place these parts of ourselves in another's hands.

Now imagine Jesus was in this space inviting you forward, drawing you to the water to have your feet washed. Does your response change? Would you be as resistant to come as you are - dirt, stink, warts, imperfection - before Jesus? Would you try to pre-wash and present only a painted on polish to hide your true vulnerability? In today's theme scripture - Jesus washes his disciples' feet. When Peter resists, Jesus insists. "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." This vulnerability is not only offered, it is required for following Jesus. For to follow Jesus we must come as we are, naked and vulnerable, before our God - trusting we will be received. We must recognize our need for Jesus, the only source of cleansing that brings about new life. The foot washing takes place only hours before Jesus' death on the cross. We are dependent on Jesus to draw us into Godself, wash away sin and bring about new life.

After the foot washing Jesus says "So if I have washed your feet you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." This is more than a call to start washing people's feet. This is a call to serve, to reach out, to give of ourselves in difficult and sometimes undesirable ways as Jesus did. This is a call to invite the other as they are - to embrace another's dustiest parts, to receive what might be ugly and full of warts, stinky and not polished, in need of care - to not judge but to serve by immersing them in pools of grace and forgiveness, splashing with them in renewal and fresh beginnings, touching with tender love.

I picture Jesus standing before that bowl – do I believe that he will receive me just as I am or do I try to hide within my socks and shoes? Do I see how badly I need Jesus to wash me or am I still trying to do that myself?

As we the people of the church try to model this Jesus, does our posture in front of the cleansing water communicate to others that they will be received just as they are, or do they get the impression they must pre-wash and polish before they could come to the waters? Do we act like we are “the polished to perfection” with rights to the water or do we clearly communicate that we are equally as in need of the God who draws all disciples in?

If you have been down to Canal Park in the last few years, on the corner in front of Little Angies, you may have seen the water spout that just spurts up in the middle of the sidewalk. As people hurry by to work or shop, as people eat and drive by, this water spout just springs forth amidst the people. One very hot summer day, I watched from a distance, as one individual walked by the water and then stopped. Hot and sweaty, this individual took off her dirty tennis shoes, pulled off her sticky socks, and fully clothed proceeded to walk into the puddle and stand over the water spout. With joy the individual played in the water that freely sprung up, embracing and washing her just as she was. Soon others noticed and she joyfully urged others to join in. Kids first and then parents dragged along entered into the water spout. Tourist and homeless, employee just off work and teenage skateboarder, found themselves refreshed right there in the middle of the road. No one felt they needed to go home and change first – no one hid their feet. There was no embarrassment, only joy that the water was there for all. They left the spout wet, leaving footprints on the hot street for others to see and follow, telling joyfully of the water that was springing forth if only one was willing to let the spout get them wet.

We are called first to see our need to give ourselves over to the water and washer of feet. Then we are called to respond with joy, to walk with imperfect wet feet, that others might see and receive what is freely springing forth for all people.

Our theme text starts today, “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God,” got up, poured out the water and washed feet. Jesus knew that he had come from God and was going to God and that knowing enabled him to serve, to draw others to the cleansing waters of forgiveness and new life. We are to know that Jesus has come from God and therefore we are God’s and are going to God. In this truth, we pour forth the water, stand in it and invite others just as they are in great joy. By this everyone will know we are disciples - for this is love. Splash on!