

Wesley United Methodist Church

April 2, 2015

"Washing Feet."

John 13:1-7

The Book of John is a swinging pendulum. From up "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God..." to down "He came to his people but his own did not receive him..." Now it's time to go back. Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father" (13:1).

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.

In the 1990 I served a church where they decided to hold a foot washing one year as part of the Maundy Thursday Service. It was the first one that was tried and, to my knowledge, the last. We wanted to have at least twelve and called the list of Administrative Council members, however, we were glad to have six willing participants who sat up front waiting for the great event.

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 chairs facing the congregation with their shoes neatly lined up next to each other like little soldiers. There was Sharon up there on the end. She had a pedicure just for the occasion. Ron's gold-toe socks were neatly folded on top of his shoes. There was a hint of Febreeze in the air. The congregation watched as I washed the six best smelling pairs of feet in the entire room. In my fond memories of that evening, I knew that Jesus was there and he was smiling...

John's Gospel tells us of the foot washing. Why? Well, as John explained it, 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."

The 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, 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 to places, do things. We can think about doing something. "I think I go to visit so-and-so..." 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 and offer a comforting hug, our feet have been 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, in both the Old and the New Testaments, were meant to do.

In the Exodus story, that is the back story for the Maundy Thursday meal, 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 other 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).

"The gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life" (Jn 14:6). You're going to need to use your feet. "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6).

We're going to need our feet to follow that way. Our text tonight is our chance to allow Jesus to cleanse our feet so we can follow him from this place.

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. Caiaphas didn't. Pilate chose to use his feet to pace about in his palace, back and forth in front of his medicine cabinet, searching for some ointment for his sore conscience. Peter chose his feet to stand by a fire warming himself while denying his Lord.

Just before this foot-washing scene, Jesus says to his disciples, "Whoever sees me sees the one who sent me."

It is the Son of God who takes off his outer robe, ties a towel around himself, and kneels before you requesting the honor of washing your feet in the hopes that, this year, he will not have to walk the hard, uphill road that lies before him all by himself.