

Readings: Exodus 12:1-4; 11-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Grace to you and peace from the one who not only *talks the talk*, but *also walks this walk* of life, of death, of resurrection. Amen.

Let's not *get off on the wrong foot* or *tiptoe around things*. Our Gospel reading tonight stands or falls on feet. Now, I know it's tempting to *drag your feet*, but just *put one foot in front of the other* and c'mon *stand up on your own two feet*. I'm serious, I'm gonna *hold your feet to the fire* on this and I'm pretty sure you'd do the same if the *shoe was on the other foot*.

Surely, I'm not the only one who's noticed that something's *afoot*, but there's no need for *cold feet*, even if it does feel like you're *holding on by your toenails* or *dancing with two left feet*. Just *put your best foot forward*, *step on it* and let's *take a walk on the wild side*. 'Cause you know as well as I do that all it takes is a *foot in the door* and before you know it you're *waiting on someone hand and foot*, you're *footloose and fancy free*, you're *head over heels in love*.¹

Still, something smells a bit like *dirty feet*, doesn't it?

Often, we talk of Simon Peter as if he just doesn't get it. And certainly, he does seem a bit clueless, when it comes to feet.

When Jesus comes to wash Peter's feet, he's a denying fool: "Never Lord! Never will you wash my feet!" And it's not the last we'll hear from this denying fool over the next few days.

But maybe Peter gets it, *really* gets it. And maybe that's the problem.

And who can blame him, it's one thing for your feet to *follow* the feet of Jesus – through Samaritan territory resting at a well to cool your feet; stooping down to mix a little mud to put in the eyes of a man born blind; a long journey by foot to the tomb of Lazarus – it's one thing to *follow* on the heels of Jesus, watching as he challenges and heals as he calls to new life and deeper trust and belief.

¹ Nearly all of these metaphors are taken from: www.foot-reflexologist.com/foot_metaphors.htm

But it's a whole other thing to have your feet washed by this Jesus and Peter seems to get that.

One author talks about how there are really two levels of understanding this act of foot-washing.² On one level is this custom that was in place at the time. I know you've probably heard the lecture before, if you went to someone's house for a meal it was common practice that the master of the house would have his slave wash your feet.

But how's this for a graphic description? Foot-washing "was an onerous and demeaning task because it meant washing off human and animal waste. Human waste was emptied out windows onto the city streets each morning, while animal waste was ever-present. Therefore, no matter how well a person bathed, sandals and feet inevitably became smelly and dirty in the process of walking to a meal at another's house."³

Simon Peter wants to know what the Son of God is doing – not just with bunions and calluses – but... *I can't even say it it's too scandalous...* Even for Jesus, this has to be a new low; *stooping down to wash away the excrement.*

This is what Simon Peter gets. And this is why Simon Peter refuses to take part.

In his Palm Sunday sermon, Pastor Tom talked about the pyramid structure of Roman society. Caesar at the pinnacle. A few governors and other mucky-mucks along the next layer. The merchants and other nobles along the next layer. And this huge group of servants and slaves at the foot of the pyramid (so-to-speak).

And tonight, Jesus doesn't just abolish the pyramid scheme. He plays the jester. He plays the fool. He stoops down and plays the slave.

It's one thing to say, "This whole system is stupid, it's a scheme, it's a ruse." But it's another thing to wade into it all, isn't it? It's another thing to play by the rules and put yourself at the foot of the pyramid.

This is what Simon Peter gets. And this is why SimonPeter refuses to take part.

² *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* by Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh (pages 219-20).

³ *Ibid.*

But there's another level as well. It's equally scandalous, if not more-so. And Peter will have to go through a whole other set of denials (three in fact) before he "gets it" – before he "stoops" to the next level himself.

Simply put: "Foot washing becomes a prophetic action that symbolizes forgiveness. The feet stand for activity, actions. To wash another's feet is to wash away the actions they may have...performed... Here the foot washing is a parting gesture performed by Jesus and urged upon his disciples; they must forgive one another as he forgives them."

Jesus plays the fool, the slave in the pyramid scheme; but like Moses to Pharaoh in the Passover story, like a computer virus planted in a whole system, a network of computers – once *forgiveness*, once *healing*, once *wholeness* is planted by God at the foot of the pyramid, it eats away at the whole thing. And it won't be long now before it all comes crashing down.

Still, I can't help but think of feet. Real feet. Here's a picture of some real feet, if we're not just going to *talk the talk, but walk the walk*. If we're going to make it through the next three days, we have to *get our feet back on the ground*.



Some of you might remember that our youngest son (Leif) was born with clubfeet. It was a mild case (we can admit that now), but don't ever say the word "mild" to any parent going through any kind of anything with their kids. Casts, surgery. Mild, severe. None of it matters when it comes to your own flesh-and-blood.

Still, one corrective surgery (where they literally cut his Achilles' heel and let it grow back), a few casts (one of which slipped off and left a pressure sore right on the front of his foot), and God only remembers how many months of him sleeping in these shoe-braces that looked like some sort of Medieval-torture device and now we hardly think of it anymore. But this story isn't about my son or his feet.

We spent a day last July hiking in Arches National Park (which by the way is not the month of the year that I'd recommend going, in case you're wondering). At the end of this hundred-degree day, we're sitting at a motel pool cooling our feet and in strolls another family – a couple with a young boy, roughly the same age as Leif (maybe a year or two older). And I said they "strolled" in, actually we noticed quickly the young boy was walking with a strong limp and his feet are kind of turned in. Then we notice the long scars up and down the length of his legs all the way down to his feet.

Well, we can't help ourselves, we test the waters first with a little small talk, but then we dive feet first into a conversation with this couple and it turns out that their son (he was adopted from Morocco) was born with clubfeet. And before he was adopted he had a surgery, several surgeries maybe, that are long out of style with any doctor who knows anything about anything because it actually makes things much worse rather than better.

The family was driving home that day to Colorado from Salt Lake City. Their son had several surgeries to correct the original surgeries and with this latest trip, the doctors had removed the casts from his legs for the first time, practically since he started walking.

It's a complicated story, I know. For that reason maybe it doesn't make a great metaphor for this Maundy Thursday. There are layers of privilege and so-called "developed" nations and so-called "third world" nations and all kinds of questions about health care systems. There are layers of questions about why *our* son had a "mild" case of clubfeet (yes, we'll fully admit it now) and why another was not so "fortunate." There are layers and questions, which I don't mean to dismiss.

But what I want to say is this – when my heart... (my heart and what it had been through with my son and his feet) when my heart saw that young boy, scars the length of his legs, up and all the way down to his feet... when I saw that young boy walking from the pool to the hot tub and back, cautiously, uncertain at first, but then splashing in the water, playing, free from casts...

This is the kind of freedom that Jesus offers when he takes his place at the foot of the pyramid schemes of this world, when he takes his place at your feet and offers a life-and-death promise of forgiveness.

This is the kind of forgiveness given freely to all who gather around this table, whether you can make it *on your own two feet or not*. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the one who died. The one who lives again and forever and always in and through love that frees.

It's good news, that no question, will *heel your sole*. Amen.