

Maundy Thursday 2020
Jesus Maundy Thursday foot washing:
a wet explanation to the ongoing impact of the biggest weekend in world history

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Tonight I bring to you grace and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. I am proclaiming the Word of God to you from John Chapter 13.

I read verse 12: *“When [Jesus] had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you?”* (John 13:12, ESV)

Let’s pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock, our redeemer, our foot washer. Amen.

“Do you understand what I have done to you?” is Jesus question to his disciples after washing his feet.

On the night before Jesus died he gave his church two great gifts – along with a whole lot of great teaching.

One gift was his supper.

The other was to wash his disciples’ feet.

In this time of physical distancing I thought tonight would be a great chance to have a look at how his foot washing serves us.

We are not gathering around the Lord’s Supper.

But as we stand at the head of our reliving this greatest weekend in world history – the Easter weekend – Christ is still VERY MUCH at work in washing our feet as we shall see.

I start with the observation that in John’s Gospel Jesus goes near water a lot.

And every time something profound happens.

I’ll give you a brief recap of the what I call the watery accounts.

Early on John the Baptist points across the water and declares him to be the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

Jesus takes 600 litres of water from purification jars and turns it into abundant wine that in the OT was a symbol of physical and spiritual joy.

Then he tells Nicodemus of Gods provision of baptism by water and the Spirit.

After that he converts a whole Samaritan village with his promise of a never ending supply of water that will spring up into deep lasting life.

Then he heals an invalid who had been trying to get into the water of the pool of Siloam.

After feeding 5000 he walks over out on the water to save his terrified disciples from the storm.

Then he mixes mud and saliva to heal a blind man in order to teach us about spiritual blindness (mud and saliva have a lot of water!)

And at chapter 10 he declares himself to be the Good shepherd – Psalm 23 reminds us that the Lord leads us beside still water.

And now at chapter 13 – the night before he dies – we are told that:

*“He rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he **poured water into a basin** and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.” (John 13:4–5, ESV)*



So given what’s gone before, Jesus going near water suggests that something quite out of this world is going to happen!

Let’s see.

Washing feet was a job reserved for the lowest of the household.

The servants, but even *more so* the slaves.

On those dirty feet was not *just* the dust and dirt of the roads.

It was also the human excrement that people used to throw into the drains and the animal dung that was left on the roads.

Jesus is literally entering the filth of human existence here.

The disciples called Jesus teacher and Lord though (v13).

Do you know that in all the records we have from ancient times there is not a single record of any ‘person of superior status voluntarily washing the feet of someone of inferior status’? (Lincoln in Bruner, p762)

Do you think Jesus is turning things upside down?

Yet that’s just the earthly aspect.

The cosmic ramifications are even more amazing.

John's Gospel started off with the declaration that

'Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made' (John 1:4 NIV)

In terms of this footwashing I guess the closest we get to that is as parents cleaning up soiled nappies of their toddlers they have brought into the world.

That's service, commitment and love isn't it?

But for the creator to be on bended knee in a loin-cloth washing his disciples feet tells us something of cosmic proportions is going on here.

In fact this act of this humble service becomes a symbol of so much more.

First, there is the act of taking off his outer garments and later putting them on.

It's exactly the same language Jesus used earlier where he said he had the authority to **lay down his life** and **take it up** (John 10:14-18).

It's starting to get obvious where this is heading: his foot washing is about his death and his resurrection.

I find all this quite captivating.

One of my favourite writers puts it this way:

'Isn't this little Disrobing-Rerobing Scene, in short, a little picture of the of Jesus' Cross and Resurrection?' (Bruner, p756).

Have you ever thought of Jesus washing of the disciples feet that way?

'[Jesus] takes off his purely divine prerogatives from heaven, he puts on his human towel of earthly service to his world, and he prepares to wash us his people, in his cleansing crucifixion, depicted here as the footwashing' (Bruner, p756).

By now it shouldn't surprise us that the moment just after Jesus death is also marked by water (of course).

We are told:

*'One of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and **water**'.* (John 19:34)

The point of all this is quite clear.

Jesus tells Peter during the foot washing that "Unless I wash you, you can have no part of me" (John 13:8)

It's Jesus saying: "If I can't forgive your sins, you can't have any part of me".

What Jesus shows us in this washing is that he came to forgive sins.

We just need to let him.

You might think that's good – I'll sit back and let him.

But look at how hard that was for St Peter.

Letting him do this work is harder for most people than they think.

For a start, it means we need to realise our depravity.
Do you?

It means we also need to suspend our **disbelief**.

Yes - our deepest shame... Jesus cleanses that.

Our vilest sin.

Jesus gets down on bended knee and wipes that excrement off.

Our lack of trust.

Jesus disrobes as a slave and goes to work to remove the dung of idolatry.

Which brings us back to the question Jesus asks of his disciples after the washing:

“Do you understand what I have done to you?”

Could they foresee how their foot washing was shorthand for the events of the weekend to come?

Do you see that in hindsight *now*?

But not just shorthand as a description.

Do you see how that cleansing was for you?

In this time of not sharing the Lord’s Supper around our respective altars the footwashing reminds us of God’s continual care through our baptismal washings. Not just now – it’s always sitting there... we probably just don't focus on it enough.

We thank the Lord for their **ongoing renewal and feeding** as we remember our baptisms and hear his words of cleansing all over again.

But I didn't want to spend the rest of my time on the cleansing of baptism.

Baptismal living is also about living its fruits.

You see the foot washer hasn't finished at this point.

He doesn't just leave us cleansed so we can be put back in the shoe rack smelling nice and fresh.

To his own question “Do you understand what I have done to you?”

he answers:

“For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.” (John 13:15, ESV)

Yet his request to follow his example is not about working out of our own resources.

It's about the fact that in his death he has empowered us to do that.

Take forgiveness.

Isn't that the greatest act of service?

Wasn't that at the heart of Jesus great cleansing of us?

Forgiveness in our day-to-day gets way too hard without working out of the servant foot washing of Jesus.

If our Lord will wipe the dust, dirt, excrement and dung from our souls, minds, hearts and bodies that cleansing is good for sharing with others isn't it?

'Do you realise what I have just done to you?'

It's also a call to be the best servant for his sake in every situation we are in.

Listening.

Helping.

Hospitality.

Being attentive.

Being present.

No greater need for these things than at this time where so many people are feeling so stretched.

Once again it's out of the deep cleansing by Christ that we are resourced for this.

He wraps all this up though in promising us ongoing blessing.

For Jesus finishes this little foot washing depiction of his death and resurrection with "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (John 13:17).

Jesus and water!

When Jesus goes near water profound things happen.

With one little wet act of washing his disciples feet he sums up the whole Easter weekend – the biggest, most essential and important weekend in world history.

A weekend with eternal consequences for you.

But in doing so he gives our tired minds and bodies an easy way to think about it.

He also goes to work on us to do that cleansing.

Then enables us to do his cleansing work to cleanse others.

And he blesses us continually as we do.

Blessed Easter to you – how can you not have a blessed Easter when you remember the way he has washed your feet?

In Jesus name+. Amen.