

<i>Date Preached</i>	01-Apr-21	<i>Date Initiated</i>	11-Mar-21
<i>Where Preached</i>	SAK	<i>Appointed Readings</i>	Maundy Thur, All Yrs

" [I]f I, as your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet,
[so] you ought to wash one another's. "



The readings we hear this night are a veritable preacher's paradise: resonant and yet familiar ... brimming with the love, mercy and hope of God ... the very font of rituals, sacraments and devotional acts that Jews and Christians still practice to this very day. We hear God institute the great high festival of the Passover. Saint Paul recounts Jesus' institution of the Holy Communion. And St John records the very emblem of Jesus' selfless servanthood, as He washes the Disciples' feet in the Upper Room the night before He is to be crucified: an act which we both commemorate and embody in this night's liturgy. Given all this, it surprised me a bit that where the Spirit led me in my pondering of these rich texts was the interior narrative John says was running through Jesus' head this fateful night.

John is the evangelist we most associate with the spiritual and mystical: often bypassing 'conventional' human ways of thinking and sensing in favor of a less cognitive, more experiential grasp of God that we actually *feel* and *act*. But *this* night, John is careful to name exactly what Jesus is thinking as He sits at table ... for the last time before the Cross ... with His most devoted followers. John tells us several times what Jesus "knows."

- He "knows" that He has come from God and is going to God. The doctrine of the Trinity has not developed at the time John writes, but clearly, Jesus knows He is inseparable from God.
- Jesus also "knows" that God has placed all things in Jesus' hands: that with Him rests both the ability and the authority to conquer death and restore humanity to God's intended design.
- And Jesus "knows" that the hour of His saving death has come: Now is the time when He is to redeem the world and join the Father in Heaven.

From this vaunted knowledge—of His own divinity; of His supreme power; and of His all-the-more gracious sacrifice—springs Jesus' astonishingly humble act of washing His disciples' feet. And this juxtaposition of knowledge and humility is key to our understanding why Jesus washes His friends' feet. It is not just a homely act of devotion. It is not just a parting gesture of affection. It is not even just a lived-out parable, as Jesus once again turns the world upside down. You see, in those days, washing the guests' feet was usually the job of the lowest servant in the household, a task many echelons beneath the Son of God.

The foot washing *is* all of those things, of course, and *also*: It is the act Jesus performs in response to knowing that in a few days, He will have atoned for the sins of the world and eternally redeemed humanity. Knowing that His death will somehow—it still remains a divine mystery to us—work the salvation of humanity, does he analyze or explain? No. Knowing that He is about to up-end this world's order, forever, does He seek glory or accept adulation? No. Knowing that He is

to ... and must ... die a gruesome, agonizing death at the hands of petty despots, does He mourn or seek pity? No. Knowledge of His divine destiny brings Jesus neither to tears nor to joy ... but only to His knees: He lays hands on one of the dirtiest, unregarded, even shameful parts of His friends' bodies, in an act of love that is intimate and also uncomfortable ... generous ... and also degrading ... sufficient and also gratuitous: neither required nor expected.

And from His royal throne there on the cold stone floor of the Upper Room, wet rag in one hand and St Andrew's foot in the other, Jesus imparts not only His love but also His final command—mandate—*Maundy*. The self-denying, lowliest servanthood He embodies is not His alone, but also our duty to emulate: "[I]f I, as your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, [so] you ought to wash one another's." Just as Jesus' response to knowing the boundless love and depthless mercy of God is humble and loving servanthood, so must **be ours**, as well.

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It is, perhaps, a perverse benefit of COVID that the specific response we make this night is not only symbolic, but also concrete and enduring. Barred by a virus from our accustomed dainty daubing of one another's feet with equal parts Anglican restraint and modern squeamishness, we, like Jesus, have nevertheless fastened on our aprons: We've reached into our wallets, gone out to shoe shops, fetched packages from the post office and carried our gifts to altar: more than 130 pairs of shoes and sneaker and XXX pairs of socks. And unlike most years, the humble service we perform tonight will not fade from memory almost as soon as it is over, but will live on for weeks and months to come: protecting the soles of those who live in abject vulnerability; keeping warm and dry the feet of people soaked by the cold rain of imposed invisibility and cruel contempt; maybe giving, in the simple pleasure of a new pair of shoes or even a fresh pair of clean socks, the smallest measure of worth to those whom this world insists on marking down as worthless.

And like Jesus, we do not glory in our generosity or grow smug in our sacrifice, for we know that our serving the Servant of All ... requires *our* serving all. Knowing that we've been washed of our sins in the Font, we respond with a rag and a basin and a new pair of sneakers. Knowing how we are fed at the Altar, we respond with groceries and hot meals on Sundays and thousands of hard-boiled eggs. Knowing the things our Lord and Teacher has taught us, may His blessing be upon us when, as we ought, we also do them.



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