

And so we wash each other

Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12:1-14a•Psalm 78:14-20,23-25•1 Corinthians 11:23-26(27-32)•John 13:1-15

*And so we wash each other,
warm water splashing over
tired feet into bowls, gentle
hands, massaging aching
muscles, tight sinews, thick
terrycloth scrubbing the wet
away, cool air on newly clean
really clean this time, feet . .
and the eyes and the smiles
and the hands of friend and
stranger, calling forth our own
touching tenderness: the
tenderness of Jesus.¹*

Janet Campbell, captures the essence of the Maundy Thursday liturgy in a remarkable book: *Through the Window of the Ordinary – Experiences of Holy Week*.

We come to each other today in a most tender and intimate way. Here we are in church – and we actually touch the naked flesh of another person. Maybe a stranger – that’s odd enough.

But perhaps even more vulnerable, we might touch the flesh of someone we know.

It might be someone we don’t especially like. Someone with whom we’ve quarreled, someone who slighted us. Maybe someone whom we have wronged. Yet here we find ourselves, at least this one time each year, asked to humble ourselves in this very open, very public way.

When I was growing up in Oklahoma, a very easy slur that slipped off our tongues was to call someone a “foot washing Baptist”. At that time, it meant someone who was very unsophisticated. Someone who was so naïve as to take the words of Jesus literally.

Perhaps the most famous foot-washing Baptist in literature – other than Jesus – is Boo Radley. That odd – thought to be dangerous character – in *To Kill a Mockingbird* who kept a watchful eye over Jem and Scout and Dill. Boo and his family were looked down upon for any number of reasons. One of those reasons was that they were foot-washing Baptists.

As if that were a bad thing.

It’s a curious thing. Had John’s Gospel been the only account of the life of Jesus that was handed down to us by the early church, we would do this every week. In John’s Gospel

– there is no Last Supper. No words of institution from Jesus upon which to base the Eucharist. Just words of institution, that we should follow his example and do as he did for us.

So we are now each invited, on this day, to a Footwashing.

If you're afraid to let someone see or touch your feet, I invite you to lay aside your pride and be a little vulnerable today.

If you're afraid to humble yourself by kneeling at someone else's feet, I invite you to lay aside your fear and be a little vulnerable today. If you blush at the thought

of someone touching your feet – then blush. If it tickles when someone touches your feet then laugh. If the water is cold – then shiver. If doing what Jesus asked us to do makes us cry – then cry.

All that Jesus asked us to do on that last night, was this:

You should do as I have done to you. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another even as I have loved you, so you also love one another.

Don't be afraid.
Do as Jesus did.

¹ From *Through the Window of the Ordinary: Experiences of Holy Week* by Janet Campbell