

John 13:1-17 NLT

13 Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end.² It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. ⁴ So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, ⁵ and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.

⁶ When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷ Jesus replied, "You don't understand now what I am doing, but someday you will."

⁸ "No," Peter protested, "you will never ever wash my feet!"

Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me."

⁹ Simon Peter exclaimed, "Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!"

¹⁰ Jesus replied, "A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not all of you." ¹¹ For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹² After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing? ¹³ You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that's what I am. ¹⁴ And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. ¹⁵ I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.

Bernhard Strigel's painting of *Christ Washing the Disciples' Feet* illuminates for us the scene of the Last Supper. We meet Jesus and the apostles gathered around a table set for the Passover meal—the roasted lamb and bitter herbs scattered on the tabletop tell us that they are celebrating the memorial feast described in the Exodus reading. The room is small, creating a sense of intimacy as the group gathers tightly around the table. Pieces of bread, small plates, knives, and the chalice are

scattered messily, telling us that the food has been enjoyed by the people here. The crumbs show us the human touch, clear signs of their engagement and participation.

Taking the theme of engagement to a deeper level, in the foreground we find Jesus in the act of washing Peter's feet. From the messy, post-meal table, Jesus invites us into another mess—the dusty and worn feet of Peter, toes which he hesitantly points out from under his garment. Expressing profound love, service, and intimate communion, Jesus reaches for these to wash them, shocking and humbling Peter, who will have to learn the lesson his Teacher has just modeled for him.

Feet are our most humble part, closest to the ground, in constant touch with our utter humility of being dust. While Peter partially covers his feet, Jesus' foot is fully exposed, showing his embrace of humility and his determination on the way to the cross. In the back of the scene, John the Beloved Disciple hesitantly offers his own foot, almost touching Jesus' extended hand, signaling his loyalty and trust in the Lord.

Strigel was most famous as a portrait painter, and the expressions he captures on Jesus, Peter, John, and Judas tell the story without words. Strigel also uses symbolic language to reinforce meaning: knives point to the chalice on the table... and Judas, who is on the left, in yellow, holds a chalice that signals the suffering that is to come, evoking the cup of salvation and sacrifice. Other vessels also carry meaning: the basin under Peter's foot is like a baptismal, and like the platter under the lamb, reinforces the idea of sacrifice as essential to our Christian story.

As we gather today as the Alpine Presbytery in a world that is anything but predictable a few thoughts from Jesus' actions are sitting with me. Jesus was about to face the horror of betrayal, abandonment, and crucifixion at the hands of those he created. Jesus also knew the disciple's world was about to be shattered ... how did Jesus occupy his last moments of freedom... how did Jesus enact love in this place when he could have quite legitimately recoiled with anxiety and fear....

Jesus knelt down with humility and served his disciples by washing their feet... the final loving action of Jesus to his disciples was to wash their feet...

Turangawaewae is a powerful Māori concept. Turanga means standing place and waewae means feet. Turangawaewae are places where we feel especially empowered and connected. They are our foundation, our place in the world, our home....

In his last moments on earth Jesus knew his turangawaewae and shows us ours... His place of empowerment, his foundation, his connection didn't come from what was going on around him, it came from his relationship with his Father, it came from fulfilling all God had called him to do on earth...

And in washing the disciples waewae/feet he is connecting them to their call, to their place of empowerment to follow his lead and go and wash the feet of those God calls them to, just as Jesus has done it for them.

Pondering this another thought struck... did Jesus get the idea of washing their feet from the woman, in Luke 7? The woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair... Jesus told Simon, when he criticized her actions, that her actions were actions of great love... Jesus' feet, at that moment, were the nameless woman's turangawaewe

Out of that place came an act of love that Jesus carried forward and embedded as a way of life for all who would follow him...by kneeling and washing his disciples feet...

In our unpredictable world we as a church could also easily recoil from life as fear and anxiety run rife... We're in a season where it's hard to have any great vision for the future, let alone tomorrow... nothing is clear... where is God in all of our pandemics, wars and global warming weather events? In Jesus we can see where God is. In Jesus we do have a turangawaewae, we do have a place to stand, a place to be empowered, a place to be connected...

Jesus is still in the business of washing feet, of raising the broken to life... but your hands and my hands are the hands he uses today... As Teresa of Aville said with such simple wisdom

“Christ has no body but ours. No hands no feet on earth but ours.
Ours are the eyes with which He looks with compassion on this world.
Ours are the feet with which he walks to do good.
Ours are the hands with which He blesses the world.”

Through Jesus’ simple act of washing feet, we get a glimpse of our call through the lens of Jesus’ grace. When Jesus sees dirty feet, He sees a chance to wash them. When he sees disease, He sees the opportunity to heal. When He sees sin, He sees a chance to forgive and redeem.

We also have a physical turangawaewae, the place where we live, work, or play... Who are the people in our church, in our community, in our world, whose feet Jesus might be calling us to wash? What might feet washing look like for those in these places...

What concrete acts of love and service might Jesus be asking us to undertake for Him, locally and globally?

For some of us, we might be the ones needing to receive Jesus’ love through letting others wash our feet... can we let *Jesus accept us for who we are, dirty feet and all? Can we let others into our pain?*

I recently took study leave to look at sexual abuse. Focusing on adult survivors and how the abuse impacted them, how the church might help or hinder in their healing. This was in response to God calling me to go and wash the feet of those who had been abused in this way... to wash their feet by listening to their stories, that had left them muddied and dirty... to wash their feet by letting their voices that had been silenced by abuse finally tell their stories... to wash their feet by sharing their stories in a way that would be able to help others find their healing...

Our call as God’s people in this place and this tumultuous, unpredictable time is to come back to the basics that Jesus showed us that night before his death... to come back to our turangawaewae, our place to stand, or in our case kneel.... our place of empowerment and connectedness ... the power of kneeling to serve another in the name of the one who first knelt to serve us....

Prayer

Who are the people in our church, in our community, in our world, whose feet Jesus might be calling us to wash, what concrete acts of love and service might Jesus be asking us to undertake for Him?

All these pieces