

2025 Maundy Thursday

I have been having this recurring image, I might even say vision, come to mind, at least through Lent, but I honestly think it began back at Christmas.

I keep picturing Mary, the mother of Jesus, standing at the foot of the cross, and all she can see is her beloved Son's mangled feet. I see her consumed by despair, helplessness, grief, anger, deep sorrow. I feel myself standing there with her, feeling absolutely useless.

As I say, I think it began around Christmas. I thought about her taking delight in her tiny baby's beautiful little newborn feet. Kissing them, tickling them, caressing them. Counting the toes.

I imagine her squawking at him to wash his feet before he came into the house after he'd been playing outside barefoot all day. I picture her sitting with his foot in her lap, holding a needle and scolding him to sit still as she digs a splinter out, or as she trimmed his nails.

I wonder if she ever offered to wash his feet when he came in after his travels. Did she roll her eyes when she heard about this young woman coming in and washing his feet with her tears, anointing his feet with costly nard, wiping them with her hair? (I can just hear her sigh about her son's questionable taste in women...)

What would she have done if she had been in the room for the story we just heard? Would she have been like Peter and argued it was not right? Would she have tried to hide her feet from him? Would she later regret that she was not among those whose feet he washed that night?

I'll talk more about the rest of my meditations on this vision of Mary tomorrow.

For tonight, I will point out that we're not looking at Jesus' feet so much as letting him look at ours.

There is an intimacy that comes from letting people look at, wash, touch, take care of our feet. I am paranoid about trying to trim my mom's toenails because at one point I snipped a little too closely and drew blood. Now she involuntarily flinches (she swears she doesn't, but she does!) and I'm so terrified I'll cut her again.

There are all kinds of cultural things going on, taboos being broken, as Jesus sets aside his robe, wraps a towel around his waist, and kneels down to wash the feet of those who have looked to him as master, teacher, leader...even Messiah.

And then he invites them—and us—to do likewise.

He tells them—commands them—to love one another. That is where the name of this night comes from. Maundy comes from an old word for commandment. This is the night we are reminded that our mission is to love one another, warts and all.

Or, to keep with the foot metaphor, callous, corn, fungus, odor, ingrown toenails and all.

Tonight I'm remembering the last time I washed Tom Gallant's feet. By then he had lost several toes—the diabetes which would eventually take his much-too-young life started in his feet. I know that he was trusting me far more than I probably deserved, trusted me to love his poor, misshapen, mangled feet. And by extension, to love HIM, with all his faults and failures and disappointments. To see beyond the brokenness to the beloved child.

There is a vulnerability in letting other people see our dirty feet, both literally and metaphorically. A trust in taking off all the things we used to cover them up and hide them away. Showing them for what they really are. Showing our true selves.

Likewise, there is a profound responsibility for the one doing the washing. We have to set aside the fear, disgust, discomfort, judgment...and allow God's love to flow through us until it spills over and washes over that

oh-so-exposed vulnerability, making things clean and refreshed and strengthened.

Tonight, I offer that to you, knowing too well how many times I have failed to be a good “foot washer.” I acknowledge that I have times when I hang back because I’m afraid, times when I don’t pay attention and snip too close to the quick or push on a tender spot, causing pain.

Tonight, we all commit ourselves to “fulfilling our vow” to quote a verse in the psalm. We commit ourselves to loving one another, as Jesus has loved us.

It is that love that gives us the strength and courage to walk back out into the world on these same two feet, and face whatever comes next. It empowers us to stand with the Mother Marys as they watch with helpless horror as empire uses hate and violence to try to silence love and justice.

It is that love that finds beauty and belovedness in the most unexpected places...even our poor, abused, ugly feet.