

## Sermon 2023 03 28 Text Maundy Thursday

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Companion on the Journey. Amen.

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Tonight, I want to talk about the very lowest of you – your feet.

How often do you deliberately wash your feet? Or are your feet washed by accident when everything from your shower runs down over them? Or are they washed by being the first things into the bath and the last things out?

Did you run and play barefoot as a child and feel the luscious green grass, or the powdery dust or the agony of a bullhead?

Looking through old school photographs, I am amazed how many people (boys or girls) were not wearing shoes. And I guess that some of those children came from families that could not afford shoes or received hand-me-downs.

My mother was a fiend when it came to going out in public. If you were going somewhere to play, the rules got relaxed. But if I was going to school, there were absolutes. Freshly laundered underwear – with the singlet ironed; freshly laundered and ironed shorts and shirt, long socks (with those wide white elastic bands to keep the socks up to just below the knee, and freshly polished black bata shoes.

How do relax at home? Do you still wear shoes, or are you mostly barefoot, or do you wear those hideous things called thongs?

Nature and careful breeding have ensured that Carlyon men cannot wear thongs. Have a look at the gap between your big toe and your next toe. No not now. I will almost guarantee you that for you the gap between your big toe and the next toe will be the same as the gaps between you're your other toes. This is not so for the carefully bred male members of that side of my family. The gap between the big toe and the next is at least twice if not three times wider than the other gaps. So, to wear thongs I have to scrunch up my feet to hold thongs on or lose them every third or fourth step.

How are your feet in ageing? Are they broken, distorted, increasingly unattractive appendages that you want to hide from the world.

I do not care what your feet look like – I would be honoured if you would allow me to wash and dry them tonight.

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In the time of Jesus, streets were dirty, powdery dusted paths used for rubbish bins, places for animals to wander and relieve themselves as well as their official function of being a mechanism by which a person could walk from one place to another.

In the heat, the sweat from your body trickled down to mix with your sandaled feet and form some sort of moist or drying crust.

So, every household attempted to have at least one extremely low caste slave to wash the feet of visitors as they came into a home.

This served several purposes: -

- It was a way of honouring guests;

- It was a way of making them feel comfortable and welcome; and
- it saved some of the cleaning in pre-electric homes,

But at the Last Supper Jesus shocked his followers by wanting to wash their feet.

The shocks came because they were his followers and considered themselves lower on the social scale than this man, they considered a great teacher, their leader on the Way, whom some had seen transfigured, and the one who would offer them absolute forgiveness by returning them to the fulness of relationship with God – and who was unblemished as required of the sacrificial creature.

What they gradually came to realise is that in the act of washing, Jesus was giving his followers a template of how they must serve. They must serve all – even the ones they know will deny them, even the ones they know will betray them. Jesus made no distinction in serving the disciples – he washed the feet of Peter and Judas as thoroughly as he washed the feet of the other disciples. It was a sacrificial and sacramental act.

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When I was first here as a young curate, one of the tasks that was given to me was to ensure that there were at least 12 people in the congregation who would come forward and allow Archdeacon Herbert Booth to wash their feet.

I was not pleased to receive this task. So, I made sure that at least half of the number were people he did not get on with very well or people who did not particularly like him.

In hindsight, I realise he entrusted to me the task of bringing those exact people to him. He trusted me to ensure that he did not just wash the feet of people who liked him or worked well with him, he wanted to wash the feet of the fringe dwellers or people with whom he was in some way at odds and by entrusting the task to me (knowing that I would not like it) he was able to ensure the humility and service of this sacramental act.

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Could I ask you, at the appropriate time, to allow me the honour of being the lowest of those who serve you?

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