

## JESUS AND WATER: SURVIVING THE SUMMER HEAT

### *Foot Washing*

John 13:1-15

Jesus is hosting a dinner for his twelve specially selected disciples, including the one who will betray him. Jesus has invited them to sit at table with him; which they have done many times during the past three years.

While eating their meal and enjoying each others company they notice Jesus moving away from the table, removing his outer garment, and tying a towel around his waist. The conversation quiets to just a few whispers. Jesus then pours water into a basin and proceeds to kneel in front of one of his disciples—unlacing his sandals and washing his feet. The faces of the disciples express shock and confusion. There is now complete silence.

Over the past three years these men have witnessed Jesus doing many things that were against social custom and religious law. They have seen him take time with people that others never seem to see; except to judge and to call them sinner. The disciples have been moved by Jesus' compassion and tenderness; in fact, this is why they are still with him. He has challenged them to live and to think differently. He has called them into relationship with God; not into following religious rules and regulations. But this! Jesus the host is now Jesus the servant. It is the custom that the servant in the house will wash the dirt from the feet of the guests—not the host.

Jesus slowly and deliberately moves from disciple to disciple, kneeling before each one, unlacing their sandals, washing their feet. Except for Jesus' movements there is utter silence—no one is saying a word. That is, until Jesus kneels in front of Peter and begins to unlace his sandals. *“Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”* Jesus responds, *“Peter, you may not understand right now but in time you will.”* Peter shakes his head saying, *“You will never wash my feet.”* With a saddened expression on his face Jesus looks directly into Peter's eyes saying, *“Well then my dear friend, we have a problem, because unless I wash your feet, you cannot sit at table with me.”* Not sit at table with Jesus? Peter cannot bare the thought of it—not sit at table with Jesus! *“OK lord, then wash my hands and my head as well—just go ahead and give me a bath.”* Even though the other disciples are accustomed to Peter's vocal ways they are stunned by what they are hearing from both Peter and Jesus.

At this point in our text Jesus says things that are not easily understood. Theologians and scholars continue to study and disagree over the meaning of Jesus' words. The best that I can say is that Jesus relates his washing the disciples' feet to the future, to their eternal relationship with God. That he, Jesus, is their host-servant, and his current act of service, washing feet, is symbolic of his total life's mission as a servant—as one who will die serving. *“Peter, you may not understand this right now but in time you will.”*

Jesus washes the feet of all twelve of his disciples—including the one who will betray him, including the one who will turn on him. Jesus kneels before Judas as he does the other eleven, and very caringly washes his feet as any common servant would do. And never

doubt my friends but that Jesus knew that this one he ministered to, that he invited to table with him, would be the one that would sell him for thirty pieces of silver. Jesus knew and still he washed his feet! Silence!

Jesus sets the basin aside. He removes the towel from around his waist and he puts his robe back on, and then he assumes his place at the table saying, “*Do you know what I have done to you?*” Silence! “*You call me teacher and lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.*” Silence! “*For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.*” Silence!

Most who follow Jesus’ life and teachings, who identify as Christian, even those in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would certainly say, “*I will gladly wash Jesus’ feet! I will gladly, as a servant, kneel before Jesus and lovingly wash his feet.*” The irony is that Jesus does not ask us to do this. What we would gladly do he does not request. Rather, he insists that we permit him as servant to wash our feet, and then that we should follow his example and as servants wash each others feet. Silence!

The silence that we see the disciples display as Jesus washes their feet was not around when Luke records them arguing about which of them is the greatest. Jesus silences their argument when he says to them, “*...the greatest among you must become like the youngest and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.*”<sup>1</sup> While Jesus’ disciples argue about which of them is the greatest he identifies himself as a servant—a role that Jesus calls all of his disciples to embrace.

Friends, today’s water story is about relationship and community. Kneeling before our brothers and sisters and washing their feet removes any possible distance between us. Today’s water story is about giving of ourselves in service to our brothers and sisters. For you see, as we serve each other, relationship and community are deepened and strengthened.

And further, as uncomfortable as it is to consider, we need to remember that Jesus did not exclude Judas. Jesus washed the feet of the one who would betray him. There are no excuses as to why we can not be servant to one another. No one has done anything so horrible to any of us that we cannot kneel before them and wash their feet.

Jesus does not call his disciples to greatness of place but rather to a life of service. If and when we ever loose sight of serving one another we have lost sight of what we are about—being Jesus’ disciples called into relationship and community.

Jesus says to his disciples, “*You call me teacher and lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.*” For my friends, it is in serving each other that true greatness is found!

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 22:24-27