

An Invitation to Foot washing

The disciples gathered around the dinner table at that last supper with Jesus could hardly have missed the reality that it was an unusual night, a night filled with meaning. What was Jesus doing, stripping down and hanging a towel around his waist just as a common servant would have? Peter, standing in for the disciples, standing in for us, speaks up and asks... and in Jesus' response we can begin to understand the true meaning of what we do this night. Whether or not the other disciples thought that they deserved to have Jesus wash their feet, we know Peter didn't. I know I don't.

But Jesus insists. And while he is most insistent, that insistence is really an invitation to share in God's work, to become an intimate partner in the ministry of love.

We are mostly uncomfortable with this kind of vulnerability. When Jesus began to actually touch the dirty, calloused feet of the disciples, when he began to wash the dust and smell from them, he touched them and spoke to them in a way that words alone could not. Jesus' response to Peter actually tells us who Jesus is, and who he calls us to be. Jesus' response to Peter's hearty rejection of having his feet washed is often how it is to live our lives in Christ:

"You don't understand now what I'm doing, but it will be clear enough to you later..."

Foot washing is one of the most humble, humbling and loving acts of service imaginable. It requires courage. It requires trust. Jesus says to us just as he said to Peter, "this intimacy is so important, this act of servanthood is so important, this expression of love is so important, that without it, we can have no share in him." Jesus is showing Peter and showing us, that without humility and loving servanthood, intimacy with God is not possible.

And Jesus says the same to us today. As we prepare to receive the mysteries of this Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Great Vigil of Easter and beyond, we are called to wash each other's feet. In having Jesus wash our feet, in washing each other's feet...what we are saying is "yes" to God again. Yes, I want to share in your ministry of servanthood; Yes, I want to share in your ministry of healing, Yes, I want to share in your ministry of blessing, Yes, I want to share in your ministry of love.

That is what we do every Maundy Thursday when we wash each other's feet. We say "yes" to the God who wants us to have a share in the Kingdom of heaven and in God's overflowing and boundless love. Come, wash each other's feet.

Adapted from The Rev. Arlette Benoit. (St. Paul's, Atlanta GA)