



Scripture Reading: John 13:1-17

Foot washing and embodied love in the time of corona virus

Perhaps you have visited one of the many salons to get your ‘feet done’ – a relaxing feet massage and

pedicure, the full works. The essentials always interest me – latex gloves, curiously shaped nail clippers, sanding tools, lotion, soap, salt-looking sort of grit, foot basins, towels, fragrant incense etc. Then there are the conversations, perhaps one you are invited into or those you overhear. The whole environment is not merely about getting your feet done. The set up makes one feel good. I always feel good afterwards and would often promise to make it regular, yet fail to do so. I am always amazed with the speed, the strength of hands, the care and seriousness with which the masseurs (often of some migrant background) carry out their work.

Have you ever thought of the link between the foot-washing Maundy Thursday ritual with that of the service of these modern-day foot masseurs? Perhaps, the Mennonite or the Anabaptists were on to something in their insistence that this act of embodied love should be a regular ritual, rather than a ‘once in a blue-moon’ one. And, would it be way out to consider whether the washing of feet in the first century included a bit of a foot massage? I’m not sure we know the answer to that. I can envision, though, that just rubbing the dusty feet of a weary traveller (especially where sandals were the main footwear) would have been going, at the very least, that extra mile of service. Today, there are some local churches that open their spaces for such (pedi)care – putting the gospel into practice through intimacy. Think of what this may mean for a lonely or a homeless person. Can you imagine their joy? *‘You know, nobody ever touches me. I was thinking I was untouchable.’*

In it not incidental that this ‘foot-washing’ account follows that of the other one – the perfume anointing of Jesus’ feet. Can you still smell the discomfort, the practical messiness, the surprise and fragrance of the act? In this infectious time, when not touching (personal), and thus by extension distancing (social), are the operative socio-juridical mandate for the collective and common life, when we are enforcing strict physical boundaries of social existence, what does it mean to think of touch, as touch from others/touching others or washing feet from the perspective of our faith? How can we make touch, and washing feet, a habit for holiness and release from so much that restrict us (not only at this time)?

The relationship Jesus calls us into as walkers of his way of “full life for all” is not a relationship of quick smiles and firm handshakes, elbow or feet bumping or hugs. It is a relationship of foot-washing. A relationship of intimate touch. Christ calls us to love one another as he loved us. And how he loved us is by washing our feet. As our spaces of communal worship continue to remain shut in time of coronavirus, may our hearts remain open and may we especially remember those who are caring and nursing the many who are unwell. May their touch and their presence of intimacy bring peace, healing and hope.

An Act of Love

Whether you are alone or with your family: why not consider a simple act of foot-washing/massage, mindful of all the necessary precautions....

A Prayer

Use the pauses as opportunity for silent contemplation.

Holy God, holy and glorious, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.”
[pause]

God-who-stoops-to-wash-touch-caress-and-dry-fee, help us not to calculate the cost of or hold back our love for you in ways that may be perceived as extravagant, improper or foolish. [pause]

Deliver us from all which drains the colour of life out of us at this time. [pause]

Instil in us this day, a sense of peace, joy and a persevering heart as we attempt to embody, live out and weave the thread of your love in the torn fabric of our life together. [pause]

May all we think and do this day and every day grow out of and pour into overflowing expressions of your abundant and fragrant love. [pause]

AMEN

“A loveless world is a dead world.” [Albert Camus, *The Plague*]

