



# TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*on the Branford Green*

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

The Rev. Sharon K. Gracen  
Maundy Thursday, 2016

The message of Maundy Thursday with its culturally disconnected ritual of foot washing is service and discomfort. There are lots of pieces here - the service makes us uncomfortable in a way that is the complete opposite of Jesus' example. He said, "see me, your leader, your king, willing to take on the most menial task. This washing of your feet is done for you regularly by household servants, you are used to it. You are not used to anyone other than a servant doing it. Well, I'm telling you that we are all to be servants of each other and especially of those who never get their feet washed."

What makes us uncomfortable about this ritual is completely the opposite - we don't care who's doing the washing, we just don't want to have our feet washed - because they are a fairly imperfect part of us.

Every year, I try to think of an alternative act that would make this ritual relevant in the Jesus way. Washing a homeless person's clothes, by hand - is the closest that I can imagine. Perhaps washing their hair of whatever might have been ground in or grown in there. This is the kind of thing that Mother Teresa did regularly.

But I think we have to stay with this discomfort of having our feet seen and touched because our feet are an important part of our spiritual journey.

Seminary professor Alyce Mckenzie wrote this rather insightful piece on allowing our feet to be washed...

"In the 1990s, I belonged to a church where they decided to hold a foot washing one year as part of the Maundy Thursday service. It was the first one they had ever tried, and, to my knowledge, the last. The pastor had the secretary call down the list of Administrative Board members trying to get twelve people to agree to sit in a row up front that night and let the pastor wash their feet. She got turned down six times. She got discouraged and ended up settling for half a dozen pair of feet up front instead of twelve.



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That evening, as the sun set and the moon rose gleaming through the stained glass scene of Jesus in the Garden behind the altar, there they sat up front, in a line of folding chairs facing the rest of us, with their shoes neatly lined up next to each of their chairs like little soldiers. There was Joyce up there on the end seat. She had had a pedicure just for the occasion. I could see her bright coral nail polish blinking from my seat. I could see Ralph's "gold toe" socks neatly folded on top of his newly polished wing tip shoes. I could smell a hint of Febreeze that Denise must have sprayed in her shoes just before she left home. We in the congregation got to watch while the pastor washed the six best smelling pairs of feet in the entire town. In my fond memories of that evening I think of it as the "Demo Footwashing."

John's alone of the gospels has the foot washing. Why? Well, as John's Jesus explains, it is to set an example for us of service to others.

But I don't think John wants us to sit in the congregation this Maundy Thursday and watch Jesus wash some other people's feet and say, "Isn't Jesus a thoughtful person? We ought to be doing things like that in our church."

This text is not about watching Jesus put his hands on somebody else's feet. It's about letting Jesus put his hands on our feet. Not all of us want that. One reason maybe is that we're embarrassed about our feet. It's not as if we as the church of Jesus Christ are a foot model convention. As we get older, we may one day look down at our feet and say to ourselves, "Whose veiny, bulbous, knobby feet are those? And how did they get on the end of my ankles?"

A deeper reason we don't want Jesus handling our feet is because to allow Jesus to touch our feet is to allow him to touch our will. We all have a mind; we all have emotions; and we all have a will—our decision making power. Our feet are how we put our decisions in motion and get places, do things. We can think about doing something. "I think I'll go to her father's memorial service out of respect for her." We can feel we ought to do something. "I have a feeling it would be a good thing to do." But if we are going to actually show up and walk up to her afterward and offer a comforting embrace, our feet have to be involved.

To allow Jesus to cleanse our feet is to remove all that prevents us from using our feet to follow him. To scrub away our insecurities, to wash away our weariness, to buff off our bitterness.

And then our feet are refreshed to do what feet in scripture, in both the Old and the New Testaments, were meant to do. Follow God.

It is the Son of God who takes off his outer robe, ties a towel around himself, and now kneels before you requesting the honor of washing your feet in the hopes that, *this year*, he will not have to walk the hard, uphill road that lies before him all by himself."

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