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## *Love, and Be Loved*

**A sermon by Canon Cathy Zappa**  
**Maundy Thursday – Year B**

I tend to appreciate other people's vulnerability much more than I appreciate my own. And so it's often easier for me to listen to someone else's problem than to confess mine; to offer help than to ask for help myself; even to wash someone else's feet than to let someone wash mine.

I'll be the first to admit that my feet are not the most pleasant—or presentable—part of me. They've been around the block a few times, and they have stories to tell. And since they're easy to cover up, I don't attend to them the way I might attend to a part of me that is always exposed, like my face.

If you were to take a close look at my feet, you might see how hard they work. You might notice that I don't frequent the spa; that I'm getting older; that I'm not the perfect person that I'm sure you all imagine me to be. And I'm not sure that I want you to see all of that.

I don't think Peter wants his friends to see his feet, either, and all that they might give away about him. So when Jesus gets up from the dinner table and wraps a towel around his waist and brings his bowl of foot-washing water to Peter, Peter panics: "Wait a minute! *I'm the server* here, not the one who needs to be served. And I'd be so embarrassed for my teacher, whom I respect so much, to touch my dirty feet." So, full of pride—and of shame—Peter rejects Jesus' gesture: "*You will never wash my feet!*"

But Jesus knows firsthand how humbling and intimate and downright awkward it can be to let someone he knows and cares for wash his feet. He remembers how vulnerable he felt when, so recently, his friend Mary bent down close to his feet and poured expensive perfume over them and then wiped them dry with her hair. So he tells Peter: "*Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.*" Unless you let me serve you, *too*, Peter. Unless you let me love you, *too*. Unless you let me humble myself before you, *too*.

And once again, Peter responds to Jesus' correction with a complete about-face: "*Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!*" With Jesus' help, he gets it. He gets that Jesus is preparing him for what's coming, and teaching him about a new kind of love and community. He gets that he need not be ashamed – not of his feet and the stories they tell, not of his need, not of his vulnerability. And he gets that he can't minister to others with grace and humility, as he's called to do, if he will not also let others minister to him.

This story is often interpreted as a command to get busy: serving, helping, loving. That is part of it, to be sure, and that might be the part that many of us are most comfortable with: the doing ourselves, which can feed an illusion of control and self-sufficiency and invulnerability and even superiority.

But that's not all there is to this Gospel. It's also a command to share the privilege of ministry—to let our ministry, and our love, be mutual and just. It's also an invitation to *receive* love, from Jesus and from one another. To *be loved*, as we are: imperfect, sinful, ashamed, human.

This Gospel encourages us to let go of our pride, and our shame, which tend to go hand in hand. To take off our masks. To uncover our feet—or whatever we think is unlovable in us. To let ourselves be seen, washed, and loved—not just by strangers or professionals, but also by those closest to us.

*“Love one another,” Jesus says, “as I have loved YOU.”*

It may be that our greatest challenge is not *loving* one another, after all, but letting ourselves be loved. It may be that our greatest challenge is *trusting* that God loves us, long before we’ve *done* anything to deserve it, or helped anyone else, or even know how to show love ourselves.

Lord Christ, you bid us love one another as you have loved us. Grant us the courage and humility to love and to be loved; to give and to receive; to wash others’ feet, and to allow others the privilege of washing ours, too.

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