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## *A Towel, Basin, and Some Water*

**A sermon by Canon Wallace Marsh**  
**Maundy Thursday – Year C**

The towel, basin, and water are important symbols for us tonight.

In the early Christian days, when people were invited to a meal, after walking through dirty roads, they were greeted by somebody at the door with a towel, a basin, and water to wash their feet and hands.

The person at the door was a fundamental part of the meal, even though that person never sat down to participate in the meal.

Typically, the person that was doing the washing was a lowly and nameless slave to those gathered around the table for dinner.

That is why Jesus shocks his disciples when he takes a towel and starts washing the feet of his disciples. Peter can't understand it because Jesus was mirroring the work of an insignificant slave.

He says something like this: "Are you kidding my Lord, are you going to wash my feet? No way! You cannot do that, this is the work of slaves, of servers, of someone from a different class than us."

But Jesus insists and says: "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."

Here is another way to understand Jesus' words: "Unless you take the position of a servant, you cannot see me, claim you know me, or understand what the gospel is all about."

And Peter, responds: "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"

A towel, a basin, and water are important symbols tonight because they remind us what it means to be followers of Christ.

Yes, there is an element of vulnerability when someone is washing your feet. There is a good chance someone will notice that my feet are the reason your feet need shower shoes. Yes, that is part of the awkwardness of this evening.

But more than that, the towel, basin, and water are about what it means to be a servant, and how servanthood is an integral part of creating something we like to call *koinonia*, a holy community.

When we act as servants to one another, during the best of times and worst of times, we create *koinonia*, and we become a community that practices grace, excellence, and hospitality.

That is exactly what Jesus is doing at the Last Supper. Jesus embodies the role of a servant and in doing so creates holy community, some might even say Holy Communion for those gathered around that table.

And I believe this is fundamentally the call of the church in today's world—to serve and create community.

A few days ago, Canon Maxwell forwarded me an article that was the basis for his Letter to Anna in this week's Cathedral Times. He said this will preach on Maundy Thursday, and I couldn't agree more.

The article is an interview with Francois Clemmons, about the years he spent working alongside a Presbyterian Minister by the name of Fred Rogers.

In the interview Clemmons describes a scene very similar to the one in today's gospel. The scene occurred on Fred Roger's television show—*Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.

For 25 years, Francois Clemmons played the role of the policeman on the beloved children's program *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.

Clemmons joined the cast of the show in 1968, becoming the first African-American to have a recurring role on a kids TV series.

And, in the decades he spent as part of the show, [there's one scene in particular](#) that Clemmons remembers with great emotion.

It was from an episode that aired in 1969, in which Rogers had been resting his feet in a plastic pool on a hot day.

Clemmons recalled the moment Fred Rogers “invited me to come over and to rest my feet in the water with him,”

He went on to say, “The icon Fred Rogers not only was showing my brown skin in the tub with his white skin as two friends, but as I was getting out of that tub, he was helping me dry my feet.”

Notice, there was a towel, a basin, and some water.

Clemmons says the scene—which the two also revisited in their last episode together, in 1993—touched him in a way he hadn't expected.

A towel, a basin, and water is what it means to embody the role of servant.

In the context of Mister Rogers Neighborhood, a towel, a basin, and water did wonders to create a real neighborhood.

In the spirit we try to embody at the Cathedral of St. Philip, a towel, a basin and water help create and sustain koinonia.

Let me conclude by saying you might be curious as to how Clemmons' got the role as the policeman?

Well, Fred Rogers noticed Clemmons by hearing him sing in church.

Why is that important? Well, tonight we will wash the feet of those sitting, singing, and gathering around the table with us.

For those gathered in the upper room, and for those gathered in this room, Christ teaches us what it means to be a disciple and create holy community...and it involves a towel, a basin, and some water.