**Maundy Thursday 2025**

Everyone is familiar with the Japanese custom of removing shoes

before entering a home. However, an equally important practice, that

gets far less attention, is that for the Japanese footwear must always be

worn out of doors. In other words, no prancing around outside while

barefoot. That is because the bottoms of your feet will get dirty and

make it impossible to go inside without bringing in the dirt — unless

you wash your feet before entering.

As the story goes, when the Franciscans arrived in Japan in the 16th

century, barefoot, the Japanese were appalled and offended. Who

are these dirty people in the funny brown robes?! Things generally did

not work out well. Many friars were persecuted and martyred. The

Franciscans were able to return to Japan in the early 20th century, as

new trade routes began to open up. Things went better this time, but

there had been a price to pay.

Some say that the feet are an erogenous zone. But according to a

new study in Smithsonian magazine, notwithstanding some people who

have foot fetishes, it’s not true. Seems to me, there is something about

feet though. They’re not private parts but exposing them is tricky.

We shake hands but we don’t rub feet with each other when we meet.

I’m thankful for my feet, because they get me around. I protect them

for that reason. I don’t particularly think they’re beautiful. I have big

feet—size 12—and my second toe is longer than the others. This tends

to be an Anglo Saxon trait said to have earlier Neanderthal origins. I

don’t know, how do you feel about your feet? Mixed?

I’ve conducted Foot Washing ceremonies in every parish I served

before retiring. Honestly, I’ve never been crazy about it, not because

I’m adverse to its powerful symbol of Christian servanthood, but

because it seems out of context and, well, a little creepy. And

everywhere I served not many people came up for the foot washing,

and the others who didn’t come up ended up feeling awkward for no

good reason. I vowed that after retirement my foot washing days were

over. The Brethren do it regularly, which is one of the reasons I couldn’t

be a Brethren.

So let’s step back for a moment and think about this. Foot washing

was part of the Palestinian culture in Jesus’s day. They went around in

sandals and their feet got dirty. There were house slaves, bond

servants, called douloses whose job, in part, was to wash householder’s

filthy feet. Yes, Jesus lived with and relied on slaves. At any rate, when

he washed the disciples feet at the Last Supper, he was putting himself

in the position, literally, of a doulos. This was shocking to them that he

would lower himself to such a level. They were now doubly befuddled.

“This is my Body, this is my blood” was confusing enough, now the

slave deal.

In terms of the Eucharist, he said “Do this in remembrance of me.”

He didn’t say that about foot washing. It’s very much optional, again,

unless your Brethren. I’m not hating on the Brethren, but we’re

Episcopalians, both solidly Catholic and Protestant. Now, you and I

might not think our feet are beautiful, but God does. And why?...

Well, Isaiah 52:7 says,

How beautiful on the mountains  
    are the feet of those who bring good news,  
who proclaim peace,  
    who bring good tidings,  
    who proclaim salvation,  
who say to Zion,  
    “Your God reigns!”

St. Paul picks up on that in Romans 10:14-15…

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And

how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And

how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can

anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful

are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Ah, there we are. Our feet are beautiful because the Church, not just

its clergy, carry the Good News of Christ Jesus to those we are led to in

daily life. Linda mentioned to me that she invited a Wegman’s co-

worker to church. She’s yet to come, but Linda planted a seed that can

be watered for God to give the growth, and Linda’s beautiful feet

carried her face-to-face with her friend. The Episcopal Church I grew up

in thought it unseemly and even rude to presume to invite someone to

church. But in those days, everyone was going to church so it would

have been considered sheep stealing.

I’d like to conclude this sermon with our Christian mandate or

mandatum from the Latin, then call you forth for a foot blessing. And

you’ll be glad to know you can keep your socks and shoes on for it! As

you return to your seats, Tiffany will sing Handel’s wonderful piece

about our beautiful feet, based on the text from Isaiah 52.

And so, I invite you all to come forward for a blessing…

**Mandatum**

Fellow servants of our Lord Jesus Christ:

On the night before his death,

Jesus set an example for his disciples by washing their feet,

an act of humble service.

He taught that strength and growth in the life of the Kingdom of God

come not by power, authority, or even miracle,

but by such lowly service.

We all need to remember his example,

but none stand more in need of this reminder

than those whom the Lord has called

to the ordained ministry.

Therefore, I have invited you who share in the royal priesthood of

Christ, to come forward for a blessing of your feet.

‘A servant is not greater than his master,

nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him.

If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

‘Peace is my last gift to you, my own peace I now leave with you

peace which the world cannot give, I give to you.

I give you a new commandment:

Love one another as I have loved you.’

**The Blessing of Feet**

Christ, our brother, I ask you to bless my feet and the feet of these

dear ones for humble service; teach us the ministry of serving others

even as you have come among us, not to be served, but to serve.

May our feet bring your Good News to all we meet, and

Especially to the poor and poor in spirit.

For you are our teacher and example, now and forever,

and we ask these things in your Name.

**Amen.**