

On the way to Calvary - Hilary McDowell
Week 5 Choices
Sunday - The Servant King



Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet

13 It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. John 13:1-17 (NIV)

It was difficult for her to watch the actions of Jesus after the supper. She had felt more comfortable observing Mary anointing Jesus' feet and drying them with her hair. But seeing that towel and basin in Christ's hands - those same objects she had seen in her dream - watching him bend low upon the floor, each pair of disciple's feet cupped in his hands as he washed the grime and dirt of the journey from their skin, made her hackles rise. What was wrong? Hadn't the servants done their job properly when the disciples had arrived for the special feast? It was a routine task upon entry to every home to cleanse the feet, and she appreciated the necessity even more now that she had trodden those grime-laden, dusty dirt-tracks around the countryside. Even with her 21st century hiking boots, a foot bath would have been more than welcome. She imagined how much more the natives of this century would welcome it, wearing only rough, open sandals. Surely it would have been all the more essential as part of the purification rituals for such a feast, to wash before eating.

Yet here was Jesus 'doing the needful' after supper. Maybe he was trying to make a point. What a surprise for the servants to see the chief guest in the house, the one who had booked the room, who in this gathering acted as the host would act throughout the feast, now doing their job with basin and towel. Just as the traveller had not attempted to touch the cup in Christ's hands, knowing that she was no longer dreaming and could not effect change anyway, so also she restrained herself from attempting to pick up the towel and basin. She wished she could, though. She would gladly have saved her Master from this menial task. He had better things to do, she reckoned. Peter seemed to think so also. He even protested, not realising that only Jesus could fully cleanse him and enable him to enter into full fellowship and relationship with himself, the Christ. Poor Simon, she thought - so brash, so earnest, his sincerity transparent as he gets the idea and volunteers for the full works without comprehending the symbolism of what Jesus was demonstrating. This act of love, on Jesus' part, in its unreserved caring, its ignoring of all preference of worldly status, its parallel with the cleansing power of what Jesus would do at Calvary, scared her. If Peter had got it wrong, how much more might she be missing the point?

Suddenly a premonition flashed before her mind- the visual image of what she knew, from scripture, lay ahead. She saw another towel and basin similar to this one, but the hands that held it were different. They were cultured hands, not used to manual labour - no carpenter, this. He wore rich robes of bright and costly material and as he dipped his hands deep into the water in a feeble

attempt to cleanse his soul from guilt, she heard Pilate say, 'I am innocent of this man's blood. See to it yourselves' (Matthew 27:24)

In the upper room, she wished she were still in her dream, able to grasp that basin from Jesus' hands and show him how Pilate would soon try to wash the Lord's blood from his conscience. She wished she could cry out to Jesus, 'Tell him, tell Pilate you are innocent. He is open to the truth. Make a defence and Pilate will let you go free. He knows you have done no wrong.' But even as these desires overwhelmed her, she saw a goblet lying accidentally overturned upon the floor, and as the rich red wine spilt its blood-red stain across the floor, Tracy knew beyond all question that she could not, dared not, stop the spilling of God's blood, or she herself would have to cleanse her hands of the deed. The world was waiting, desperately waiting for salvation. Instead she held invisible hands out towards the towel and basin, praying with tears in her eyes, 'Wash me too, Lord, wash me clean.'

Where might she have to stoop to acknowledge that she was not greater than her master? What would the showing of love yet cost her in his service? Could she journey all the way to Calvary?

'If only the world was not so needy, Lord,' she prayed silently. 'There are too many people in my world at home - hurting souls, bent double with sorrows. You hear the cries of the lost ones, who don't know your saving power; the bereaved one whose days are dark with grief; the ignorant ones who believe that life in the absence of you is all the happiness there is; the despairing ones whose living no longer embraces hope; those laid low with burdens of sickness or handicap or failure, or self-esteem fractured by abuse or rejection or desertion or betrayal or...Oh no, Lord, there are too many people. I cannot help them all. I am only one person...'

She broke off her prayer because someone was leaving the banquet. One of the disciples had quietly and discreetly risen to his feet and was, even as she looked around, stepping out through the door. Only by the conversation of the others she ascertain whom Jesus had asked to leave. The disciples were chatting about his departure. One wondered, 'Where is Judas off too?' another guessed that he was away on an errand, as he was the treasurer of the group. Maybe Jesus had sent out for more food, or to send a donation to one of the many charities thronging the marketplace, but nobody was sure, no one really knew why he had gone, although, since Jesus himself had sent him, they reckoned it was none of their business.

None of their business, thought the traveller! There were eleven left and only one Judas. If only they had taken some responsibility, rather than leaving everything to be 'sorted' by Jesus. If only they'd asked the right questions, followed up on the hints Jesus had dropped during the supper, even cared enough to volunteer to go out with Judas as his colleagues

Dear Lord,

The responsibility is ours, isn't it? Not the blame for all the world's ills or the task to solve one of them, but the privilege, the honour of seeing the difference your salvation makes for a broken world when our efforts of action, sacrificial use of time, finance, and love, are supplied to the circumstances in which our day-to-day lives are rooted. I can't stop the earthquakes, Lord, or the famines or the terrorism, and no volcano's power is mine to quench, but you put me on this planet for a reason. You gave me your salvation and hope for a task. Help me to take responsibility for what is at my hand. Bring me some feet to wash today. Amen.