

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share in me.' John 13:8

When I typed this line of Scripture, I mistyped. I wrote, *Jesus answered, 'Unless I was you, you have no share in me.'*

'Unless I was you, you have no share in me.' My slip goes to the very heart of the Gospel. Unless Jesus is us, we have no share in him. *Unless* God becomes human, God cannot know us fully. And *because* God becomes human, we can know God more fully. Not completely, *through a glass darkly*, as Paul says, but more fully than if Jesus had never walked the earth.

At a meeting last week, a colleague showed me proudly a book his wife had just authored: a book about the art and craft of weaving in Latin America. The book is filled with photographs of fabrics and of women working. But the page I flipped open to showed the backside of a woman on her knees, her feet sticking out from beneath her long skirt.

Her bare feet. The soles of her bare feet front and center in the large color photo. Her black soles. “A lifetime of walking on dusty roads,” my friend said. “Maundy Thursday,” I said, “foot washing.”

Because this is how I imagine all the disciples' feet looked, and Jesus' too. *A lifetime of walking on dusty roads*. That's what they brought to the last meal with Jesus, and that's what they would take away for the rest of their lives. Some lives would be very short. Jesus', certainly. Judas's also, the gospel tells us. But many of the men and women at that dinner would go on to carry the Good News all around the Mediterranean world, carry the Good News on dirty feet, on dusty roads.

The story of Jesus' last days seems played on fast forward—*Little children, I am with you only a little longer*—and at the same time, agonizingly protracted. And isn't that how it always is in times of crisis? Time becomes elastic, as we live it and as we re-live it in memory. What happened when? How long did it take? What were we thinking and feeling?

Our stories of crisis often seem, after awhile, to become cast in stone. We tell them over and over in the same way. And yet, if we pause and spend time meditating on those moments of crisis, moving ourselves back in time and space to focus, to be *present* in that past, we often unearth new or forgotten feelings. The event becomes new again.

So it must have been for Jesus and his disciples. Everything of their time together is gathered up and compressed into a single evening: table fellowship, teaching, mutual care, ritual, betrayal, faithfulness. The foot washing is not only an act of hospitality and love, but a kind of baptism, a cleansing, a freeing from sin.

But how briefly that freedom remains. Judas turns Jesus in to the authorities. The disciples fall asleep. Jesus is arrested and confined. Peter denies him. He is tried, convicted, nailed to a cross and killed. The disciples run away. All in three days.

A lifetime of grief in three short days. Time collapses.

But then, time expands. The disciples discover that Jesus has not gone altogether. They regroup, they rejoice, they set out on dusty roads to change the world. The Good News spreads to the far corners, though time and space, and enters our lives to change them forever.

If we pause and spend time meditating on those moments of crisis, moving ourselves back in time and space to focus, to be present in that past, we often unearth new or forgotten feelings. The event becomes new again.

So, on this most holy of Thursdays, let us enter again into that last meal with Jesus and his friends. Let the moment wash our souls, as the water washes our feet. Let us become one with the story.

'Unless I was you, you have no share in me.'

Amen

