

24 feet gathered around a table. 12 sets, all splayed and stretched out in different directions. It's a table that is low to the ground, not surrounded with high back chairs, with a fancy tablecloth on top, but just a long piece of wood, big enough for all to gather. This isn't DaVinci's last supper with everyone positioned neatly. Some of them would have been on their sides, others probably on their stomachs, fully stretched out, you didn't eat on chairs in ancient Judea, but on cushions and pillows, sprawled out for comfort and so you knew you were settling in for a good meal and a long talk. It kind of has a slumber party vibe, a bunch of friends packed around a table with wine and bread, jokes being told, someone probably dozing off now and then, all of them probably solidly under 30 years old. Just guys hanging out to enjoy the holiday together. 24 feet exhausted, dusty, sore, sweaty, in desperate need of a messianic pedicure. Which I highly doubt they expected they were going to get and yet...here we are. So, even though I know that feet are not anyone's favorite topic of conversation, let's think about these 24 feet that stretch out from this communion table.

There are John's feet, which, if feet can do such a thing, exude confidence and assurance that he deserves his place around this table, because Jesus loves him. John's feet which have trod back and forth across many fishing boats, tangled in nets, slippery with fish. Feet which will in a

few days time sprint from the center of town to the empty tomb. Feet that felt the tears of Mary fall upon them as she watches her son die. Feet that when he was little probably raced his brother down the shores of the Sea of Galilee to see who was fastest.

And speaking of, there are James' feet, I like to imagine next to his brother's, maybe they look similar, share in curve of them or maybe have a mole in the same place. Feet that maybe are a little smaller than his brother's but just as fast, just as strident. Feet that have also felt the water of the sea and the dirt of their hometown. Feet that probably kicked his brother on occasion when John's self-confidence crossed to cockiness. Feet that like his brother's felt the rock of the mountain of Transfiguration, feet that have stood in the presence of Moses and Elijah.

Next to James' maybe lie the feet of another younger brother, another set of fisherman's feet who constantly try to follow in *and* break out of his brother's footsteps. Dear Andrew. Andrew's feet which followed John the Baptist and then raced across town to tell his brother that he had found the Messiah. Feet that are desperate to make their own mark on the world despite the constant comparison to his brother's.

And there are his brother's feet. The first to be approached. Beloved Peter, whose feet he refuses to let Jesus touch initially. Feet that have

walked on the water, felt the waves against his ankles. Feet that have stumbled backwards when told that Satan needed to get behind Jesus. Feet that will trace the cobbles of the high priest's courtyard, feel the warmth of the fire, and the bitter words of denial. Feet that are worn and wearied. Fishing feet, Transfiguration feet, feet that will also run to the tomb, albeit slower than John's, but brave enough to actually enter the tomb and feel the cold stone of its emptiness beneath them.

The path continues, the feet of a tax collector who has stood on so many doorsteps demanding payment, sweet, changed Matthew. The feet that will be labeled doubting, but which encouraged the others to follow in Jesus' steps to Bethany where Lazarus had died, brave Thomas. The feet which ran to find his best friend under a fig tree in Bethsaida to say he had found the Messiah, Philip's gospel spreading feet. The feet that were found under that fig tree, which dug their heels in, questioning how anything good could come from Nazareth, Nathanael's questioning feet. The feet of the forgotten, Simon the Zealot or the Cananean, James, son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, feet that walked every mile Jesus walked too.

And then we come to the last pair, the pair that have had trodden a little slower from carrying to weight of the common purse around his waist, feet that know the feel of the rooms of the high priest, feet that have weighed

the cost of walking into a room where you will choose denial, feet that followed Jesus until they didn't, feet that will walk the path of Gethsemane and bring him face to face with his Messiah and kiss his cheek, sealing his fate. Judas' feet. Feet that Jesus washed just the same, knowing full well what was to come once the water had dried.

I think we forget this...that Judas' feet were around this table. We forget all the foibles and faults that these 12 men bring to this space. We tend to just think of it as a bucket of water, some dirt, and let's face it, gross feet. But it is so much more than that. Think of when someone you love cradles something that has been hurting or aching, the safety you feel, the warmth, the compassion, the love. Jesus is literally washing their feet, yes, but he's also soothing their pains, their hurts, their regrets, their pasts, and washing them anew for what comes next, for when they are the ones kneeling before those he is calling them to serve.

And because we forget this, we forget the calling and the comfort that comes with this gospel. In a few minutes, we will all kneel around this table as a family, hands outstretched to receive the grace of God in bread and wine. To this table we extend our feet out, and in that moment, we are washed. Everything we bring to this table, the weight, the worry, the pain, the frustration, the sin, the brokenness, Jesus cradles that in his hands and

says, I will hold it from now on, rise, renewed, refreshed, and ready for the next steps before you. There is nothing too heavy, too thick, too hard, too painful, too anything that Jesus can not hold for us, wipe away, wash clean, and remind us, we are God's, we are beloved, and Jesus loves us to the end and long past the end. For whatever reason you think Jesus wouldn't wash your feet, he looks you in the eye and says, I can handle that, a little warm water and love will help.

But there's a flip side here...for as much as we need the comfort that our own brokenness is healed at this table, held and cherished, it also isn't up to us who is around this table or whose feet Jesus chooses to wash. I would imagine the other disciples would have had a few things to say about Jesus washing Judas' feet if they knew what was coming at that point. You can almost imagine one of them saying on the way to Gethsemane, "How could he wash *his* feet?" And the answer lies in the greatest commandment, to love one another as Jesus loves us. And Jesus loves us no matter what, no matter our sins, our fears, our mistakes, our anything. If Jesus can wash even Judas' feet, then who are we to deny any of our siblings just an ounce, a fragment of our love? Our time, our compassion, our empathy, our servant selves? Suddenly, the gospel gets a little less comforting and lot more frustrating because it means that no feet are too dirty for us to wash.

So in this moment, as we prepare our hearts to receive these free gifts of God, given *for us*, I want you to close your eyes and picture the person whose feet you do not want to wash. Who is it that if you were asked to kneel before them and compassionately cradle their feet would you want to adamantly say no way, no how, not me? We've all got that person, we might even have a whole table full of folks in our minds. The reality of this night, this week, is that Jesus loves them too, Jesus would wash their feet, and so as difficult as it may be...may we all dare to pick up the towel, kneel before them, and let the water of love flow. **AMEN!!!**