

A reflection for Maundy Thursday  
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### **Redemption – One small pair of feet at a time**

“Jesus, the same night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take eat, this is my body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.”<sup>1</sup> We hear these or similar words most every Sunday, they form the heart of our Eucharistic worship, by them we are called to remember the work that God, incarnate as our brother Christ on earth, undertook for our human salvation.

God spoke a word... and the world came into being. And **that** Word that **was** with God and that **was** God became flesh and dwelt among us. It was this Word that was made flesh that spoke these words to us. It was this God, this “ground of all being,” this God than which “nothing greater can be conceived,” who chose to become our real flesh and blood human brother Jesus. To take on a form, a human body in that time and that space so that we just might glimpse what this God wants of and for us. To speak to us so that we might understand. This Jesus speaks to us of eating bread and of drinking wine because we understand what it is to eat bread to take sustenance for our bodies, so that we may have life. But he calls us to a deeper understanding; this is not just a loaf of bread, this is not just a cup of wine. It’s an invitation to eat these words spoken by the **living** Word, this incarnation of Divinity. To take into ourselves all that Jesus offers when he says, “Take eat, this is my body which is broken for you. It’s an invitation to become wholly enmeshed in and absorbed by this Word made flesh. To drink this blood, that is the Divine life, to the dregs. To come to the full realization of this new covenant that God will “remember our sins no more.” To enter fully into communion with the One who spoke us into existence and who desires nothing less than to love us eternally. Rowan Williams, long before he became Archbishop of Canterbury said, by the ‘gift’ of his presence – the presence in our world of an unreserved compassion and an unrestricted hope – he establishes communion...”<sup>2</sup>, by his presence as Christ God calls us into communion with Godself.

Well, if you’ll pardon the pun, that’s quite a mouthful. What does all this really mean to us here and now. “Jesus... got up from the table, took of his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.” Peter resists, and says, “Lord you will never was my feet.” He resists because the washing of feet was a job fit only for the lowest of the low, the slaves of society. No one, no matter how hospitable their house would kneel and wash a

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<sup>1</sup> BCP, p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> Williams, R. *Eucharistic Sacrifice: The Roots of a Metaphor*. Grove Liturgical Study No. 31. (Grove Books, Bramcote Notts, UK) p. 28.

guest's feet. It was unfitting, Peter could not allow his Lord and rabbi, his teacher to so abase himself as to allow him wash his feet. Your priest just got down on her knees and washed your feet. How did that feel for you? Was it uncomfortable, did you like Peter resist it? Why was it so important that Jesus wash his disciples feet? Why did Jesus say, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me?"

Let me tell you a little story. Once upon a time not so long ago and not so far away lived a man named Cain...yes same spelling, different place. Cain was born into a very rich family. Cain's father had built up an incredible fortune during his life as an arms dealer. His mother had died when he was two years old leaving him and his older brother to the care of his father. His father believed in strict discipline, that everyone must learn to fend for themselves, that in this cruel and heartless world only the strong and powerful survive. He made it clear to Cain and his brother that they would inherit nothing from him unless he determined that they were hard and ruthless enough to make it on their own. Their lives in that opulent mansion were a constant regimen of physical training and study. Their bodies and their minds were honed for strength and sharpness of intellect. Every mistake the boys made was severely punished. Each time they succeeded in a task their father would demand more. Cain excelled at it all. And yet no matter how hard he tried to please his father, there would always be a demand for more. He longed for his father's approval, just one reassuring word, one gentle touch; but always the demands grew. Cain's brother struggled to complete every task and more often than not failed. He was punished mercilessly but to no avail...over the years he grew weaker and weaker. Cain took no notice.

When the boys had grown to young men their father became ill and was near death when he called them to his bedside. "You are both useless," were first words that came from his cracked lips. "But you", and his gaze turned to Cain, "are a little less useless, so I leave you my fortune." With that he breathed his last. Cain turned to his brother and said, "You heard him, you're useless, get out of my house." Cain became all that his father had been and more. His fortune grew and as it grew his heart grew colder, he was consumed by his wealth; he destroyed anyone that stood in his way.

Very many years later Cain found himself in Angola to broker a multi-billion dollar arms deal. As he stepped out of his hotel into the searing noonday heat, a small boy dressed in rags ran up and reached for his hand. He swatted the boy away. The boy got up and reached for his hand again and again Cain pushed him to the ground. The boy got up and with a trickle of blood on his forehead again reached for Cain's hand. He was about to hit the boy again, but as the small hand slid into his he looked into his eyes and stopped. He stood frozen on the steps as the boy looked into his eyes and smiled. He led Cain down the steps and into a maze of crowded and dim alleyways. He could not let go of the tiny hand. They finally stopped at a darkened doorway out of which wafted the smell of human misery. The boy led him inside to a small wooden bench, brought a bowl of water and a towel, and disappeared into the dark interior of the room. Cain sat transfixed, he looked into the dim light and saw row upon row of children lying on filthy cots. He sat for minutes, then for hours... and finally stood up, took of his thousand-dollar jacket, picked up the bowl and knelt at the first bed. He gently lifted up the small girls' festering feet and began to bathe them with the

cool water. He moved from bed to bed, washing, oh so gently each small child some without legs, some missing arms, hands, or feet but all ravaged by war. At each bed new tears welled up and ran down Cain's cheeks as he bathed and soothed the children. When he came to the last bed, the young boy who had led him there was sitting holding the hand of an old man. He was gaunt and covered in sores but Cain recognized the old man immediately. The boy looked into Cain's eyes and then looked down at the old man's feet, raw and swollen. Cain knelt down and as his hands began to wash his feet, the old man lifted his head, opened his eyes and said, "welcome home my brother."

Christ says, each time you eat and drink of my flesh and my blood, of this bread and this wine, do this in remembrance of me. Remember that Christ came not in power to rule, but in humility to serve, because it is in serving each other that we will see the goodness of God manifest here on earth. Each time we respond to each out of love and in humility know that we do so in communion with Christ. And each time we reject each other or act with malice we reject that communion as surely as when we crucified our brother Jesus on the cross. So wash and be washed because redemption to our true and full life, the life that God so desperately wants for us, comes one small pair of feet at a time.

Thanks be to God.