

Maundy Thursday
John 13:1-17, 31b-35
March 20, 2008

Trinity Episcopal Church
Sonoma, California

Not My Feet
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

I remember vividly a conversation I once had with a fellow parishioner at St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico. We were talking about foot washing. She said to me, "Are you going to the Maundy Thursday service?" When I answered "yes" she then asked, "What are you going to do about foot washing?" I still feel my skin crawl when I think about the conversation and the problem she posed. I think I probably mumbled something benign—maybe just "I don't know." But I know what I wanted to say. I wanted to say, "It gives me the creeps. I don't want someone else washing my feet. I don't want someone else even seeing my feet." In my heart of hearts I was saying with Peter, "You'll never wash my feet."

Hear what Jesus says in response, "Unless I wash you, you'll have no share with me."

"Unless you let me wash the dirt off your feet, you'll have no share with me."

"Unless you let me wash away all the dirt accumulated on the road, you'll have no share with me."

What is it that keeps Peter from stretching out his legs, removing his sandals, and letting Jesus wash his feet?

What is it that makes him say, "You'll never wash my feet"?

What is it that keeps him from letting Jesus love him in such a tender way?

I don't think that Peter is alone in this. I know that I, and maybe you as well, sometimes have a hard time letting people help me, serve me, love me.

What is it that keeps us from letting someone else wash away the dirt we've picked up along the way?

I suspect that some of us just don't feel worthy. We think we don't deserve such tender treatment. That we haven't earned that kind of love.

I suspect that others of us feel we have to do it by ourselves. We'll wash our own feet. Thank you very much. After all, we've lived our entire lives relying on our own efforts.

I wonder if some of us just aren't ready to expose our calluses and corns, our cracked skin and dirty toe nails—we're not ready to make ourselves vulnerable in such an intimate way.

Yet Jesus says, "Unless I wash you, you'll have no share with me."

"Unless you let me love you in this way, you'll have no share with me."

"Unless you let me wash away all the hurts, the slights, the disappointments of your life, you'll have no share with me."

Tonight we join with Peter and Andrew and John and Mary of Magdela and Mary and Martha and Lazurus of Bethany and all the other disciples gathered around the table. We tell stories, we sing songs. We share a meal. Our host rises from the table. He comes to us and bends down to wash our feet, to wash away all the dirt we've gathered on the road. He invites us to let ourselves be fully loved. Then he commands us to do likewise—to wash away one another's sorrows and wounds and disappointments. To love one another as he has loved us.