

**John 13 13** Before the Festival of Passover, Jesus knew that his time had come to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them fully.

<sup>2</sup> Jesus and his disciples were sharing the evening meal. The devil had already provoked Judas, Simon Iscariot’s son, to betray Jesus. <sup>3</sup> Jesus knew the Father had given everything into his hands and that he had come from God and was returning to God. <sup>4</sup> So he got up from the table and took off his robes. Picking up a linen towel, he tied it around his waist. <sup>5</sup> Then he poured water into a washbasin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel he was wearing. <sup>6</sup> When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”

<sup>7</sup> Jesus replied, “You don’t understand what I’m doing now, but you will understand later.”

<sup>8</sup> “No!” Peter said. “You will never wash my feet!”

Jesus replied, “Unless I wash you, you won’t have a place with me.”

<sup>9</sup> Simon Peter said, “Lord, not only my feet but also my hands and my head!”

<sup>10</sup> Jesus responded, “Those who have bathed need only to have their feet washed, because they are completely clean. You disciples are clean, but not every one of you.” <sup>11</sup> He knew who would betray him. That’s why he said, “Not every one of you is clean.”

<sup>12</sup> After he washed the disciples’ feet, he put on his robes and returned to his place at the table. He said to them, “Do you know what I’ve done for you? <sup>13</sup> You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you speak correctly, because I am. <sup>14</sup> If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you too must wash each other’s feet. <sup>15</sup> I have given you an example: Just as I have done, you also must do. <sup>16</sup> I assure you, servants aren’t greater than their master, nor are those who are sent greater than the one who sent them. <sup>17</sup> Since you know these things, you will be happy if you do them. (Common English Bible)

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In preparing for this message for today, I kept being drawn to the Apostle Peter and his words in verse 7. Jesus has picked up the towel, the basin of water, and was washing the disciples’ feet. He had washed a few of the disciples’ feet and then we read this (starting at verse 6):

<sup>6</sup> When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”

<sup>7</sup> Jesus replied, “You don’t understand what I’m doing now, but you will understand later.”

You don’t understand now – but you will. Does that sound familiar?

That simple phrase reminds me of the many times in my life when someone knew more than I did, and they knew that someday I’d know more – but that day was not today.

I remember that phrase:

- In my elementary school Sunday school class when I probably scared the teacher by asking how God could be Father Son and Holy Spirit – One and yet three? It didn’t make any sense to me then. ‘you will understand one day.’
- Geometry class in the High school basement with Mr. Pomeroy... you don’t understand it all now, but you will. And I did understand by the end of the class. Just don’t ask me anything about triangles!
- Or the first day of Hebrew class in seminary when I looked at the pages of written Hebrew in my Hebrew Bible for the first time and thought, I’ll never understand it. But my friend who was a few years ahead of me said, don’t worry, you will come to understand it. And I did.
- When are some other times I remember hearing these words, ‘you will understand one day...’
- Anticipating the birth of our first child
- Waiting for the results of exploratory surgery
- Grieving the loss of a close friend or loved one ...

When have you heard the words, ‘You don’t see the way forward now, but you will...’ When have you needed to just keep walking and trusting that understanding will gradually unfold?

Our slides on the big screen for today include our Lenten image of the maze with the cross at the end. It is an appropriate image for our Lenten Gospel readings this year from the Narrative Lectionary in Year D, the year of the Gospel of John. During Lent we are reading texts that usually come to us in Holy Week. In them, Jesus is on his way to the cross- he knows the way – but the disciples do not fully understand what will unfold. They still see choices ahead of them – Jesus could leave town, he could fight, he could lead a rebellion – and at each turn of the path toward the cross, Jesus’ choice of self-sacrifice becomes clearer to the disciples.

Today as I contemplate our Lenten focal image, I imagine that this may have been how Peter was feeling, as if he was walking into a maze with Jesus, seeing the maze from the ground-level. Perhaps he is thinking, “I’m following you Jesus, but I just don’t know where you are going. My mind is full of Why? What now? Where are we going? I don’t understand... ”

We have all been there, haven’t we?

*Please remember that the sermon as preached may vary from the printed manuscript.*

It may even be that this time of transition for the congregation, after Pastor Sarah’s good and faithful ministry has ended, feels like that to you. We know with our minds that we will come out of the maze eventually – and a new pastoral leader will be in place. But right now, right here? We cannot with certainty see everything that is ahead of us. Fortunately for us, the people who assist the churches in transition in our Presbytery have accompanied many congregations like ours, and while we don’t know who will be the next pastoral leader, we do know and trust that we will be guided well on our way there.

One thing that you will soon learn about me is that I am an avid reader. I love my public library, and I participate in the “one book” reads most years, where the library encourages everyone to read the same book by offering free copies and a bunch of extra talks, lectures, book groups and other programming. “Solito,” the true story of a young boy’s migration from El Salvador solo at the age of 9 was last Year’s Multnomah library’s Everybody Reads choice and an excellent book. “Rough Sleepers” by Tracy Kidder was the One book one Beaverton read for 2026. The neighborhood book club, where I am a member, read that book and attended the author talk together. We had hoped to hear Tracy Kidder, but he was not available, so they substituted the doctor whom Tracy followed for five years before writing the book, Dr. Jim O’Connell. Dr. Jim was a rising star from Harvard medical school, chief resident in the emergency department at Massachusetts General Hospital. But when the doctors he respected at the school encouraged him to defer the prestigious fellowship he had been offered in order to be the physician to staff a grant for providing medical care to the homeless - he said yes – for one year. That one year turned into the rest of his career – you should read the book! His first day of work at the Pine Street clinic he discovered that prior to his arrival the care had been done completely by nurses, many of whom were volunteers. They wanted his expertise, but didn’t want what they perceived as the attitude of a highly educated arrogant white male physician who would be here for a year saving the day, then leave them to take a better position somewhere else. Fair.

So, the director, Nurse Barbara, started Dr. Jim on his first day of work not by seeing clients, but by soaking feet – doing the foot care that their homeless clients needed. Spending the day outside, often in wet socks, really did a number on their feet. Toenails needed to be clipped. Wounds tended. Athlete’s foot or foot fungus treated.

Dr. Jim felt a little lost at first- why am I here washing feet? He didn’t see the bigger picture. He was more than a little frustrated wondering when he could begin using his medical degree and ER experience in this new work. But his colleagues who were running the clinic knew something he did not know. First, he needed to earn the trust of his colleagues – by being willing to get dirty in the service of others. Many doctors would have quit, but Dr. Jim had been a bartender. He was a good listener, not afraid of cleaning up messes... so he kept with it.

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And by serving the clients, by listening as he washed their feet, Dr. Jim earned the trust of members of a population who didn’t trust many people. He had seen these same faces in the Emergency Department at Mass General, and had been unable to help them because they refused his care. Soon, they asked for his help. That’s the difference trust makes.

Returning to our lesson from John’s gospel, we know that Jesus had certainly earned the trust of his disciples, but there was another lesson he wanted them to learn.

Foot washing is uncommon in our times, but in a time when sandals were common and dusty roads meant dusty feet, it was a common courtesy to offer to have a slave wash the feet of your guests when they arrived at your house for a meal. It could even be seen as an act of charity if the host did this himself. But what Jesus offered was something different.

As Rachel Sophia Baard in her commentary on the text<sup>1</sup> writes

“[Jesus’] service to his disciples is neither the service of a slave to his master’s guests, nor the condescending service of a master to his social inferiors as an act of charity, rather it is the service of a friend. It is an act of inclusion into an intimate friendship with God through his Son.”

Peter, in his protests, knew that Jesus was his teacher, his superior, so he assumed this was Jesus’ act of charity. And so, he protests, refusing the charity from Jesus. But Jesus assures him,

Jesus replied, “Unless I wash you, you won’t have a place with me.”

And in so doing, Jesus makes it clear that washing their feet is an act of friendship, indicative of his care for them. It was also an act of humility, stooping to care for his friends out of love for them.

Jesus continues around the table, washing all the disciples’ feet – including Judas, whom Jesus knew would soon betray him.

Then we read:

<sup>12</sup> After [Jesus] washed the disciples’ feet, he put on his robes and returned to his place at the table. He said to them, “Do you know what I’ve done for you? <sup>13</sup> You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you speak correctly, because I am. <sup>14</sup> If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you too must wash each other’s feet. <sup>15</sup> I have given

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel Sophia Baard “John 13:1-11, Theological Perspective,” in *Feasting on the Gospel: The Gospel of John*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2015, P. 114

you an example: Just as I have done, you also must do. <sup>16</sup> I assure you, servants aren’t greater than their master, nor are those who are sent greater than the one who sent them. <sup>17</sup> Since you know these things, you will be happy if you do them.

This is one of the final teachings Jesus gave his disciples. What is Jesus trying to teach them? Listen again to verses 14-15

<sup>14</sup> If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you too must wash each other’s feet. <sup>15</sup> I have given you an example: Just as I have done, you also must do.

The lesson isn’t that they should all become teachers like Jesus and wash their disciples’ feet. The lesson is that they should wash one another’s feet – that the servant leadership Jesus has shown them should continue as they serve one another with the same compassion, the same love, the same friendship with which Jesus served them.

So, what does that mean for us?

Like Jesus’ disciples, we don’t see everything that is to come. We cannot know the future. But we do know the present – and in the present, serving one another, leaning into and creating additional relationships of friendship and trust- will prepare us for any changes that the future will bring.

During my brief bridge pastorate, I invite you to do a little foot washing. Be on the lookout for people to befriend, for ways in which to offer your gifts for service. It is easy to step back and let others serve, but I would like to invite you to prayerfully keep your eyes open for ways that the unique gifts you bring may be of use to others.

Or, if you are someone who always says yes, I’d like to invite you to take a moment and consider what our Jewish friends have to say about humility. Dr. Amy Cooper Robertson describes humility (Heb. עֲנָוָה / ah na vah) in Jewish teaching as “seeking out a sense of dignity in the space.”<sup>2</sup> Are we called in humility to take up more space, or to take up less space. What does humility look like for you in that moment? Can you and I take up just the right amount of space in the room?

Looking beyond our doors, a lesson from the churches in Minneapolis that I read recently encourages us to build relationships of trust now with those who may be in jeopardy should the immigration enforcement activities escalate here. Those ties of friendship, of mutual aid, will let us know as our friends trust us enough to share with us, what we can do to use our gifts and

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Amy Cooper Robertson in the Bible Worm podcast for March 1, 2026, as found on a variety of streaming services and through a Patreon subscription.

skills in ways that will truly help them. Like Dr. Jim, clergy in Minnesota encourage us to first get to know our neighbors. Then our neighbors will let us know how we can best assist them.

Finally, as we prepare to share the Lord’s Supper together, we remember that the Lord’s Supper does not appear in John’s gospel. John omits that sacrament, but includes Jesus’ dinner with his disciples where he washes their feet.

Today as you come forward for communion I wonder how your friendship with Jesus may lead you to use your gifts in service to others as we walk through this time of transition together? How can we love and serve each other in Jesus’ name? Amen.