



# Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina  
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MAUNDY THURSDAY  
A LENTEN MOSAIC: LIVING IN GRACE

## Bathed in Grace Exodus 12:1-14; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

I will admit that I am not “into” foot washing. Sure, I think it is a beautiful and powerful symbol of true servanthood. I would not mind washing someone else’s feet—even yours! That is what Jesus did as one of the most humble and memorable acts of his ministry. It was, as Michael Card’s poem “The Basin and the Towel” says, “a parable . . . come alive.”<sup>1</sup>

No, I would not mind washing your feet, but I don’t want *my* feet washed. I have participated in similar rituals in which hands are washed instead of feet. I was fine with that practice. Hands are “out there” anyway for all to see. Hands are easier to manage. You just wipe them with a damp cloth and dry them with a towel. It is that simple.

Not so with feet! Feet are another matter altogether. Sure, in Jesus’ day you just slipped off your sandals. With us, you have to remove your shoes and then your socks. And there they are—stark . . . bare . . . exposed. There is the dry, cracked skin, the bunion that protrudes, the persistent nail fungus that won’t go away. In our culture, except at the beach or around the house, feet are generally covered and washing them in public, especially in worship, is a very personal act. It is intimate and revealing. I am much more like Peter who told Jesus, “You will never wash my feet.”

Yet, I cannot ignore what Jesus said to Peter: “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.” Peter, who at this point could not imagine *not* being with Jesus, much less betraying him, said, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” In other words, “I am all in, Lord!”

Admittedly, it is an odd exchange between the two men. Remember, washing feet was an act of hospitality. If guests arrived after walking some distance on dusty roads, the host would have his servant or one of the women in the house wash their feet to refresh them. It is what everyone did and was

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Card, “The Basin and the Towel,” *Celtic Daily Prayer*, The Northumbria Community Trust Ltd., (New York: HarperOne, 2002), 248.

simply customary kindness. Why, then, would Jesus tell Peter that if he opted out he would no longer be his disciple?

Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet was much more than customary hospitality. It was a parable come to life, a deep truth about what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Through this humble act, Jesus demonstrated what his followers would be asked to do. They would have to be vulnerable and open to ministry. They would have to be vulnerable and open to God. If they could not allow him to do the most menial of tasks for them, how could they ever receive the greatest of gifts from him.

This night is about being open and vulnerable to Jesus. I think he chose to use the washing of feet as an object lesson because grace is like warm, clean water that washes over, under, and around us. Jesus wants to bathe us in grace that will wash off the dust and grime of life. Jesus wants to clean and refresh us which will happen only if we are willing to let down our guard with him.

We know that in scripture, and certainly in life in general, water is seen as life-giving. It is in many ways the source of life as the stories of creation reveal. Water is certainly essential for the continuation of life. Diana Butler Bass proposes that when Jesus told Nicodemus that "no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit," (John 3:5) he was suggesting that just as we associate the Spirit of God with wind or breath, we might also associate the Creator God with life-giving water.<sup>2</sup> She points out that the Gospel writer John uses many metaphors for God. Perhaps Jesus was telling Nicodemus that we connect with God, not only through the wind of the Spirit, but perhaps through water of the Creator as well. After all, one of our most significant rituals is baptism, a practice which not only indicates cleansing but also marks new life. We Baptists even go all in!

During these days of the pandemic, how important, how life-protecting, how life-giving water has become for us as we wash our hands perhaps thirty or more times a day?! We do that because of fear. We are afraid of the germs that might be on our hands. We worry about how this virus might have attached itself to our skin, our clothes, our packages. These days we wash primarily out of fear.

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<sup>2</sup>Diana Butler Bass, *Grounded: Finding God in the World* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 69-70.

Jesus was teaching his disciples—then and now—something about hope. He was modeling for them how important it is to let God bathe us in grace, to be open and vulnerable so that we might not miss an opportunity for cleansing and for life. He wanted us to enjoy, not just a sprinkle of grace, but the fulness of grace that comes from God. He also wanted us to share that gift with one another.

A few weeks ago, I heard a story that has nothing at all to do with water or the washing of feet. It did, however, remind me how grace can wash off the grime of life. It reinforced for me how openness, humility, and servanthood can be like a refreshing bath to a tired soul.

In late winter, a congressional candidate from Virginia received a number of racist tweets from another citizen of that state. One of those messages said this:

“We do not need you[r] ilk in our nation. Let alone in any seat of office above street sweeper. I didn't believe there was a place for them in our government.”

By “them” a man named Oz Dillon meant Muslims. Qasim Rashid is a Muslim immigrant from Pakistan. He is an attorney who is vying for Virginia’s 1<sup>st</sup> District congressional seat. Apparently, Dillon posted such harsh statements in hopes of getting a response. He succeeded, but it was not a response he anticipated.

When Qasim Rashid first saw the hate-filled messages on his FaceBook page, he was deeply hurt. Not only did Oz Dillon disparage him and his people, he falsely accused his religion of promoting violence including rape and beheadings. Rashid could have stopped there or even retaliated with his own hateful rhetoric. Instead, he began looking at other FaceBook postings by Mr. Dillon. He discovered that this man and his wife were deep in debt because of her mounting medical bills due to a pulmonary embolism. The Dillons had set up a GoFundMe account, explaining that his insurance premiums had doubled, they would have to sell their house to pay medical bills, and they were broke before the end of each month.

Recognizing the fear and frustration this man lived with on a daily basis, Qasim Rashid made a donation to the GoFundMe account. Moreover, he urged his 400,000 FaceBook followers to do the same thing, writing, “My faith teaches me to serve all humanity. So I've donated \$55 to his GoFundMe.

Please donate if you can." 679 of those people did, contributing \$22,745 which easily paid off the Dillons' debt.

Stunned, Oz Dillon replied on his FaceBook page, "You humble me sir, with your graciousness, and surprisingly kind words. Given how I have misspoken about you in posts on Facebook, I am truly shocked that you have shared my wife and my plight with your supporters." Mr. Dillon invited Mr. Rashid for a visit. They met on Sunday, March 8. Qasim Rashid later proclaimed, "Today I met my new friend Oz . . . I look forward to the beginning of a wonderful friendship."<sup>3</sup>

Imagine responding to hateful and destructive actions with a gift of love. That is grace.

In that upper room, Jesus took off the robe of teacher and wrapped himself in the towel of servanthood. The first person whose feet he washed was the one who, before dawn of the following day, would betray him, not once, but three times! After his death, his resurrection, and before his ascension, Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him. Three times Peter affirmed that he did. That opportunity to reverse his bitter betrayal must have felt like a refreshing bath for the soul to clear away the guilt and remorse of what had happened.

The day after Jesus washed his disciples' feet, following a bogus trial and the condemnation of his fellow Jews, Jesus was crucified. That could have been the end of the story if God were vengeful rather than compassionate. Instead, three days later, Jesus rose from death and offered all of the people who had yelled for his crucifixion—and everyone since—eternal life, life that begins here and now.

God in Christ bathes us in grace. All we have to do is be open and vulnerable enough to accept the gift. Then we humble ourselves and bathe one another in grace as well. As Michael Card reminds us in his poem, it is a call to community:

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<sup>3</sup>This story was reported in the following sources: The Wired Word, "Compassionate Response to Bigoted Comments Leads to Unexpected Friendship," (March 22, 2020); McKinley Corbley, "Politician Helps Pay Off Medical Debt for Man Who Sent Him Racist Tweets—And They're Good News Network (March 12, 2020), available online at: <https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/politician-helps-pay-medical-debt-for-man-who-sent-racist-tweets/>; Steve Hartman, "A Man Sent a Hateful Message to a Muslim Candidate. He Responded With a Call For Help." CBS News (March 13, 2020), available online at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/a-man-sent-a-hateful-message-to-a-muslim-candidate-he-responded-with-a-call-to-help/>.

In any ordinary place,  
on any ordinary day,  
the parable can live again  
when one will kneel and one will yield.  
Our Saviour-servant must show us how,  
through the will of the water  
and the tenderness of the towel.

Amen.

*The Basin and the Towel*

*In an upstairs room, a parable  
is just about to come alive;  
and while they bicker about who's best  
with a painful glance He'll silently rise.  
Their Savior-servant must show them how,  
through the will of the water  
and the tenderness of the towel.*

*And the call is to community,  
the impoverished power that sets the soul free  
in humility, to take the vow  
that day after day  
we must take up the basin and the towel.*

*In any ordinary place,  
on any ordinary day,  
the parable can live again  
when one will kneel and one will yield.  
Our Saviour-servant must show us how,  
through the will of the water  
and the tenderness of the towel.*

*And the space between ourselves, sometimes,  
is more than the distance between the stars.  
By the fragile bridge of the servant's bow,  
we take up the basin and the towel.*

*And the call is to community,  
the impoverished power that sets the soul free  
in humility, to take the vow  
that day after day  
we must take up the basin:  
and the call is to community;  
and day after day  
we must take up the basin and the towel.*

Michael Card, "The Basin and the Towel," *Celtic Daily Prayer*,  
The Northumbria Community Trust Ltd., (New York: HarperOne, 2002), 248.