The towel and basin

25 October | Practising the Way 7: Service

Scripture readings • New International Version

John 13:1–17

Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

Philippians 2:1–11

Imitating Christ's Humility • New International Version

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

A thought to carry with you

"Before Jesus puts a towel into our hands, he kneels at our feet."

At Harvest, we pause to notice how much we receive: the gifts of the earth, the work of others, the care that sustains us. Before Jesus asks his disciples to follow his example, he invites them to receive his care. We, too, are invited to receive his love, and let it shape the way we care for others.

Reflecting through the week

Whether faith is familiar or you are still exploring, take a little time with this picture of Jesus.

Pause and notice

Think about a meal you have eaten today. How many people's work helped bring it to your table?

What have you received this week that you want to give thanks for?

Sit with the story

Read John 13:1–17 slowly, or picture the scene: the meal, the water, the towel, Jesus kneeling at his friends' feet.

What catches your attention? What does this picture make you wonder about Jesus?

Peter finds it difficult to let Jesus wash his feet.

How do you feel when you need help? What makes it easy—or difficult—to receive care?

Take the towel into everyday life

Jesus invites his disciples to let his example shape their actions. Service begins with noticing the person in front of us and asking what would actually help.

Whose life could you make a little lighter this week? Choose one small, practical act of care.

Where might you need to let someone help you?

Receiving care is part of our shared life too. You do not have to meet every need or carry every responsibility.

A Harvest question

How might your gratitude become something you share—with a neighbour, through a food donation, or in caring for the earth?

A prayer

Jesus,
you take the towel
and come close to us in love.

Help us to receive your care
and the kindness of others.

Open our eyes to the people we overlook.
Give us wisdom to recognise what would help,
and willingness to do our part.

For the food that sustains us,
the earth that provides for us,
and the hands that care for us,
we give you thanks.

Let what we have received
become love we share.
Amen.

A question for each morning:
Whose life could I make a little lighter today?

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