

Speaker 1:

If you're like me, then disinfectant wipes, hand soap and sanitizer have become household staples in the same way milk, eggs, and bread are, and for good reason. If there's one thing this pandemic has reminded us of, it's the importance of hygiene and cleanliness. Throughout this pandemic, our world has received a hydrogen peroxide cleansing of mammoth proportion. But what I think we all need alongside this physical cleansing is a soul cleansing.

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Jesus offers both on the night he was betrayed. The gospel writer John indicates that Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the father. Jesus knew that Satan had already prompted Judas, son of Simon, to betray Jesus, and very shortly Jesus would be crucified. He's about to encounter a crisis moment, truly one of life and death, and his response is to cleanse.

Speaker 1:

And so he gets up in the middle of the evening meal he's sharing with his disciples. He wraps himself in a towel, and he washes his disciples feet. Now I have a five year old son and I am constantly reminding him to not touch his feet at the dinner table because it is bad manners. It would have been similar in ancient times. While it was customary for a servant to wash guest's feet upon arriving to a home, this would have been done before everyone sat down to eat. The fact that Jesus does this in the middle of the meal, doesn't so much indicate a poor host who has not provided the common courtesy of a foot wash upon arrival, but rather indicates that Jesus is intending to teach his disciples, and really teach us an important lesson.

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See, in the world of Jesus, masters did not wash the feet of servants. Jesus was always about downward mobility. He was the king who entered the world as a peasant, the king who rode into Jerusalem on a colt instead of a noble steed, the king who would soon die a criminal's death on a cross. And here again, Jesus is modeling for us what truly makes someone great is service.

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Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, an 11th century French abbot. Once said, "If you would be king in the Jesus way, it will not be with crown and scepter, but with basin and towel." When Jesus approaches the disciples, one of these men, Peter, is incredulous. He exclaims, "No, you shall never wash my feet." Jesus tries to assure Peter, but it doesn't seem to help. What's at the heart of Peter's comment here is pride. Jesus goes on to tell Peter that, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me. To have a part with Jesus means to have fellowship with him. And if we are not cleansed," Jesus says, "We will not have fellowship with him."

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I don't know about you, but I often let my pride get in the way of allowing Jesus to cleanse and forgive me. The invitation Jesus offers his disciples is the same invitation he offers each of us, the invitation to let Jesus wash us today. And we should let Jesus wash us. Not because we think or feel we deserve or need to be washed, but simply because Jesus wants to, he wants to cleanse us. There's a second invitation offered here also. Jesus goes on to explain why he has washed his disciples' feet. He says in

verse 15, "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."

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Especially in these days of global crisis, as disciples of Jesus we are called to wash one another's feet, to serve one another. It's true that serving in these days can be difficult, confusing, and exhausting. We are navigating these changes and uncertain times just like everyone else. We are grieving, lost loved ones, and we are grieving lost opportunities. And yet we are to follow the example of Jesus who on the eve of his crucifixion did not throw in the towel, but instead chose to pick up the towel and wash his disciples' feet.

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And we can still find creative ways to wash feet, reach out hands, meet needs, because Jesus modeled this first to us. And Voskamp shares these words, and I share them with you today, "Jesus laid aside both his heavenly glory and his outer garment to robe himself in humanity and wrap himself with a towel. He poured water into a bowl like he will pour out his lifeblood on the cross, and he washes the filth from the feet of the disciples like he washes the filth from my soul."

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It is no small thing to let Jesus wash your feet, even now. To receive the touch of his towel, to receive impossible grace, to simply receive. God in human flesh took on the likeness of a servant to love the unlovely. So how could we live anything less than that of a servant, because this is how we love and thank him. How can you not become one of the people of the towel when you yourself have been touched by the towel? Allow Jesus to cleanse you this day, and then allow him to hand you a towel so that you can go out to serve and love your neighbor. Blessings on you this day.