

Allen Pruitt

One of the things that came as a great surprise to me  
when I became a father,  
was just how dirty little kids feet can get.

My cousins always ran around barefoot,  
but I never paid attention to them,  
and I NEVER went barefoot myself.  
And I hate flip flops.

Which is mostly what my girls want to wear  
from April 1 through the end of September.  
Many are the summer nights  
when we get home late from some adventure and say,  
“you don’t have to take a bath,  
but WASH YOUR FEET before you get into bed!”

Here in this lovely little church,  
surrounded by the glow of stained glass  
and overlaid with the music of an organ,  
foot washing feels a little weird,  
seems a little out of place.

But I promise you,  
in the right circumstance,  
a good foot washing will make all the difference.

In my grandmother's Primitive Baptist Church,  
they did a foot washing every time they had communion.  
It wasn't every Sunday.  
Wasn't even on Sunday morning.

They'd have regular church,  
and then all the members would come back in the afternoon,  
or come on a Saturday,  
and they'd do foot washing and communion.

Always together.

Makes sense when you read this story.  
Foot washing and communion,  
done all together.

In the story they were all there in that place,  
ready to celebrate Passover.  
Jesus and his disciples.

They were with their teacher,  
their master,  
the one that they had been following  
all this time.

A few of them had said it out loud even,  
"You are the Messiah."

They were there with him  
ready to hear what's next...

John doesn't say it,  
but it was after supper,  
after he told them to share bread and wine  
in remembrance of him.  
It was after that he took a towel  
and knelt on the floor to wash their feet.

Not one of them liked it.  
A few even spoke out:  
"we should wash your feet!" ...  
"but you are our master,  
washing dirty feet isn't what saviors do!"

But somewhere deep down,  
they all knew that washing feet  
is EXACTLY what this savior would do.

They'd been around long enough,  
they'd heard enough about picking up their cross,  
about welcoming the least and the lost.

Deep down,  
they knew where all this was headed.

Which is precisely why they didn't want him to do it!  
But he did it all the same.

“After he had washed their feet,  
had put on his robe,  
and had returned to the table,  
he said to them,  
"Do you know what I have done to you?  
You call me Teacher and Lord--and you are right,  
for that is what I am.

So if I,  
your Lord and Teacher,  
have washed your feet,  
you also ought to wash one another's feet.  
For I have set you an example,  
that you also should do as I have done to you.  
Very truly, I tell you,  
servants are not greater than their master,  
nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them.  
If you know these things,  
you are blessed if you do them.”

In other words,  
“In the right circumstances,  
a good foot washing will make all the difference.”

I've often wondered  
why foot washing isn't considered one of our sacraments.  
Baptism, Eucharist, and Foot Washing  
were the only things that Jesus told us to do.

We'll baptize anybody,  
and we have Eucharist every week.  
But we only wash feet once a year;  
some churches don't do it all.

We're always more like those disciples than we'd like to admit.  
We don't go around betraying Jesus,  
holding out our hands for 30 pieces of silver.  
No, we're a little less like Judas,  
and a little more like Peter.

At first we're right up at the front of the line:  
"You are the Messiah, the Christ."  
But you can't get crucified,  
and you can't wash feet.

And then we're get sure of ourselves all over again,  
"Lord I will never betray you."  
And then things get hard  
and we lose sight of all the promises we made,  
and we hear the rooster crow sunrise  
on a day we never wanted to see.

What's left for Peter?

What's left for us?

What's left except to kneel down and wash some feet?

Humble work,  
humiliating sometimes.

But what's God calling us to,

but to humble ourselves,

to remember who is the maker

and who is the made?

And all of us made the same,

made in the image of God,

and redeemed by the love of God.

What's left for you?

Redemption is had;

God is nearby and not far off.

What's left for you

but to remember,

to remember to wash each other's feet.

Humble work,

like forgiving,

like begging forgiveness.

Dirty work,

like reconciliation,

like finding and loving your neighbor

no matter how far off they seem.

What would happen if every time we got cross with somebody,  
we had to wash each other's feet?

What would happen if every time we met somebody different,  
we washed each other's feet?

I'm telling you;  
in the right circumstances,  
a good foot washing will make all the difference.