

I'm going to tell you a story.  
It was shared with me in a bible study last week  
By a fellow who comes to Bethlehem  
I'd heard it before, maybe you have, here it is.

This guy was working as a young engineer for a firm  
That was involved in extensions to the Marion shopping centre.  
He'd tagged along, like a puppy, he said  
To check out progress on the project with his boss.

So picture his boss, a senior engineer, walking through the building site  
With the head honcho responsible for the whole project  
From the shopping centre.  
As the boss and the head honcho were talking the young engineer  
Noticed some concrete foam which appeared to be set in an unusual way.  
So he thought he'd put his foot against it to see its resistance.  
Well, unfortunately for him, the concrete was still wet  
And rather than meet with resistance, his whole shoe sank in  
And was covered in unset concrete.

He let out a cry of exclamation, and everyone turned around.  
Not only his boss and the head honcho,  
But also some painters who were working nearby.

The painters had a good laugh at the foolishness of this young engineer,  
The boss stared at him with a disapproving look on his face.  
And the head honcho just left.  
Now this guy expected to get a serve from his boss,  
But before anything like that happened the head honcho returned  
With a handful of paper towelling.  
He got down on a knee and wiped the concrete from his shoes.  
The head honcho, responsible for the whole project,  
With power of hiring and firing  
Saw nothing in unusual in doing the work of a cleaner,  
In stooping down to wipe away the mess, to help this young guy in his folly.

Now at the time this young guy, who had grown up in a Christian family

Was away from life in the church.

Yet he sensed that through this act

– and to this day he doesn't know if the head honcho was a Christian –

He sensed that through this act God was calling him back to faith in Christ.

There is divine power in true humility,

And when Jesus stoops down to clean us up,

And to help is in our folly, our ignorance, and our sin,

He calls us onto a way of life that shines with his love.

A love that is not sentimental, but practical and powerful,

That leads to the salvation of sinners,

And that leads to God's name being glorified in our world.

Listen to the Gospel of the Lord:

**And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.**

This is worth pausing on and picturing:

In your mind's eye, *picture* what is happening here.

Jesus strips off his outer clothing, ties a towel around his waist.

In the appearance of a servant, he draws a halt to the dinner proceedings

To wash the feet of his disciples, of his students.

But then John gives us these words:

**[Jesus] came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.'**

Now what's going on here? What is the nature of Peter's objection?

The text does not say explicitly, and we are invited to use our imaginations,

And to engage with the text.

Here's one way to think about it:

It's natural for us to think that when we have power

It's fitting for us to be served by others: *we* are the important ones

*Our* time is valuable, others should bend themselves to *our will*.

It seems likely to me that Peter had this vision of his future:

As a powerful person, closely connected with the reigning Messiah, Jesus

Peter, as Jesus' right hand man, would have others serve him.

But now Jesus stoops down to serve him, and Peter will not have it.  
He did not sign up with the end goal of being a servant, but a leader.  
At least, this is one way to think about it.  
Maybe you have others...

However we think about Peter's objections

Jesus will not be put off:

**Jesus answered [Peter], 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.'**

At the heart of the community that Jesus creates

Is not a power struggle, with the smartest or strongest or most cunning  
Clawing their way to the top.

Rather at the heart of the Christian community is the cleansing  
Given us by Christ Jesus.

Unless he washes us clean, we cannot be in fellowship with him,

And we cannot, therefore, be in fellowship with each other.

But through the washing that he gives us,

We find a unity not in our individual excellence,

But in our common need.

More than that, we find our unity in Christ Jesus,

Our Teacher and Lord, who stoops down to serve us.

This is, in fact, how the text goes on:

**After [Jesus] 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.'**

Jesus is indeed our Lord and Master,

He is, if you like, he is the head honcho.

And he shows us that true authority is shown in service:

On the one hand we could say that this means a service that is shown

In the willingness to do menial tasks that have no worldly glory or honour.

Tasks that have no particular sentimental appeal.

On the other hand, and at a deeper level, we could say that it means

A willingness to stoop down and cleanse each other

*As we forgive each other from the heart,*

And so show that we have a Father who is gracious and merciful,

And who loves his whole family, whom he wills to live in love.

Jesus is himself setting us an example to follow.  
He says so explicitly, so that as we follow him  
We know that God's will is done in our lives.

Jesus, in fact, gives us this encouragement:

**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.**

We are not, and will never be greater than our Lord and Master,  
But we are *blessed by God* as we follow his example,  
As we serve one another in love.

And this is how Jesus goes on in our text:

**Little children, I am with you only a little longer... I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'**

This, again, is not a sentimental love of feelings without action.

It is a love that is real and visible:

That can be seen even by those without faith.

And here's where I want to end up.

Jesus, on the night that Jesus was betrayed

Gave us a new commandment, that we celebrate tonight.

He commanded us to take bread and wine,

To give thanks,

To eat and drink together.

With this new command he gives us his word that this bread and wine  
Is indeed his body and blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of sins.

So we experience together *divine service*:

Our Lord stooping down to where we are, in our folly and ignorance and sin  
To cleanse us, to cover our shame, and bring us together in our need.

Our Lord and Master frees us to love each other, to serve each other

To forgive each other as we receive first from him

The forgiveness that he won for us

Through his suffering, death, and resurrection.

May God give us his Holy Spirit, so that we let Jesus serve us,

And in so doing are freed by him to serve each other

And live the life of Christian love. In Jesus' name. Amen.