

Maundy Thursday, Gospel Year B

God Undressed

John 13:1-35

Maundy Thursday

Analysis by Steven E. Albertin

1Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper 3Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, 4got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 5Then 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. 6He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." 9Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 10Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." 11For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

12After 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? 13You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. 14So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."

15For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. 16Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. 17If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. 18I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfill the scripture, 'The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' 19I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am he. 20Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me."

21After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, "Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me." 22The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. 23One of his disciples – the one whom Jesus loved – was reclining next to him; 24Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. 25So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" 26Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. 27After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "Do quickly what you are going to do." 28Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. 29Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the festival"; or, that he should give something to the poor. 30So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

31When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' 34I

give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

DIAGNOSIS: Undressed



Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Jesus' Undressing

"Jesus ... got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself" (v. 4).

Taking off the clothes of another can be an act of love. It can

be our aged parent, who struggles with undoing a simple button. It can be our child as we ready her for the bathtub. It can be a lover for whom we care deeply. It can also be an act of anger and violence. It can be brutal and destructive.

At the close the Maundy Thursday service, the altar will be slowly and lovingly “stripped,” reminding us that tomorrow Jesus will be completely undressed, exposed and vulnerable ... the point of it costing him his life.

Jesus’ undressing begins tonight as he gathers with His disciples in the Upper Room. He lays aside his woven tunic. He begins to undress himself. He strips for service. In the other Gospels, Jesus is also stripped. However, there he is stripped by his enemies, by those who want to mock and humiliate him.

These two undressings are very different. In one case, the undressing is forced and brutal. In this recollection from John’s Gospel, the undressing is voluntary and gentle. In one, Jesus is violently undressed by someone else. In the other, he willingly undresses himself. In both undressings, Jesus becomes vulnerable. In both, we see the love of God undressed for all to see.

Tonight, the focus is on the second undressing. Jesus undresses himself. He lays aside not only his tunic but his pride and washes the feet of his disciples. In Jesus, we meet God undressed. Every other master demands that we serve him. We are the ones who must bow down and grovel. Here Jesus does what no master would ever think of doing. He stoops to wash the feet of those who are supposed to wash his feet.

Step 2: Advance Diagnosis (Internal Problem) Not me!

“You will never wash my feet” (v. 8).

No wonder Peter protests. Peter never seems to get it, does he?

He thought that he should be washing the feet of his Master, but Jesus insists on washing his.

We no longer walk around in sandals on dusty roads. Our feet are probably not like the dirty and calloused feet of the disciples. Nevertheless, our feet are not a body part we like to show off. Some paint their toenails, perhaps seeking to distract our vision from the bumps and gnarls that otherwise disfigure their feet. Some wear fancy shoes so that we would not look closely at their bent toes. Even worse, feet may stink. We cover them, keep them hidden and out of sight . . . and smell. We are more ashamed of them than proud of them.

We cover our feet like we cover our lives. We want no one to see the ugly callouses and gnarled bunions, the embarrassing failures and shameful sins, the insecurities and fears. We want God to see us at our best too. We would rather show him a smiling face than dirty feet. We study the Bible. We memorize Scripture. We give up pleasures for Lent. We pray fervently and frequently. We eat skimpy meals at our Lenten Suppers. We give money to feed the hungry. We go to additional church services. Surely, at least God—if not our friends—will be impressed!

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Unimpressed

“Unless I wash you, you have no share with me” (v. 8).

Just when we thought God would be impressed, God comes—undressed; stripped of his glory, uninterested in our beauty and only interested in washing our dirty feet, forgiving our sins even though we have kicked dirt in his face, loving us when we are most unlovable, and going to the cross to suffer and die for us.

Tomorrow we will see Jesus in his final state of undress, nailed to the cross, with nothing left but the promise of his Father who said that their bond was all he would ever need. However, we

want to stay dressed up. When we wash others' dirty feet, when we get involved with people's issues, when we take the time for those stuck in their self-inflicted problems, when we love those who give us nothing in return but grief, we get dirty. We would rather not be dirty. But Jesus remains unimpressed. He has no part with those who think they are already clean. They remain dirty and unacceptable.

PROGNOSIS: Dressed



Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Washed

"After he had washed their feet, ... he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you?'" (v. 12).

But Jesus will not give up so easily. He washes the disciples' feet foreshadowing what he will do in the next three days. There, in his arrest, suffering, and death we meet God's love—undressed—for us. There Jesus meets all of us who have resisted his love with a love that breaks down our defenses. He

goes all the way into the tomb and beyond taking with him all our dirt, and dresses us with his love, making us clean indeed!

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Refreshed

"Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" (v. 9).

Peter gets it! Now he knows why Jesus has so undressed. Now he trusts what Jesus has promised to do. He wants it all. He wants to be totally immersed in Jesus' washing, not only his feet but also his hands, head, body, ... his whole life!

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Undressing for the World

"That you love one another. Just as I have loved you" (v. 34).

Jesus says, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you." He says this as he undresses, stoops, and washes the disciples' feet. When we are loved like that, things change. Life looks different. Free of our baggage, we too can undress. We can lay aside all the stuff that the world says that we need to hold on to in order to look good. We can face the truth. We can show ourselves to God and the world, and let Jesus wash us clean.

We may not literally wash our neighbors' feet, but we care for them, lend a helping hand, sacrifice our time. We can go the extra mile because, in our presence, they see they have nothing to fear. We want our neighbor to know that they are loved. So, stripped of all pretense, and clothed only in Christ, we love as Jesus has loved us.