

March 24, 2016
Maundy Thursday, Year C
Exodus 12:14;
1 Corinthians 11:23-26;
John 13:1-17, 31b-35
The Rev Fanny Belanger

John's Gospel is a Gospel full of paradoxes.
The things that happen are always the most unexpected.

There is this woman at a well drawing water,
and Jesus is begging her to give him a drink,
but later we realize that the woman is the one to be thirsty.
There is this man in the Temple who was born blind,
but in the end, it is the healthy people who are unable to see who Jesus really is
when the blind man acknowledges the Messiah.
And in John's Gospel, there is Jesus who gets up from the table,
ties a towel around himself and does the servant's job, washing his disciples' feet.
And it turns out that, as Jesus humbles himself, it is his own disciple, Peter, who feels humiliated.

Jesus humbles himself, and it is his disciple who feels humiliated.

"Lord are you going to wash my feet?" Peter asks:
"How comes that my Master and teacher,
would do the humble work of a servant,
kneeling before me and removing the dirt stuck to my feet?"

Peter thinks highly of Jesus, you see.
Peter is the first one among the disciples to have confessed that
Jesus is the Son of God.
Peter believes that Jesus was the one the prophets have been talking about for centuries.
Peter believes that Jesus is sent by God to restore Israel, and change the world as they know it.

And here they are.
Jesus is kneeling before Peter with a towel in his hands to wash his feet.
I think it is probably very disturbing for Peter to realize that the Son of God
would actually
come down from heaven to wipe the dust between his toes.

And so Peter feels humiliated.
He feels humiliated because the one in whom he believes so much,
the one who has all his admiration, all his love,
the one he left his home, wife and children to follow,
this man behaves like a slave, instead of accomplishing his mission on earth.

Peter is shocked and disappointed.
And so Peter has to remind Jesus of his job:
"You will never wash my feet, you are the Son of God,
you have more important things to do".

Well, hearing this Gospel today, I wonder how often it is that we behave like Peter.
I wonder how often it is that we don't let Jesus wash our feet,
because he is Jesus and because he has more important things to take care of.
I wonder if it is right to think that because Jesus is who he is,
he should not care about the messy little things in our lives.
And I also wonder how convenient it is for us to believe so.
How convenient it is for us to believe so.

Because if, as Peter, we assume that Jesus should be looking at the important things
he is supposed to do,
It means he won't look at our own poverty and our own uncleanness.
And this is how it translates in our spirituality:
How often is it that we don't pray about what we call the details of our lives because
– so we say – God has more important things to handle?

Do we acknowledge before God our anxiety, our dark thoughts, our feelings of self-loathing?
No, God has other things to do.
Do we talk to God how badly we need a few drinks at night?
No, God has other things to do.
Do we talk to God about this sibling we have not been seeing for years?
No, God has other things to do.

How often is it that we draw a line between us and God?
Out of respect, out of love, yes.
But also: to keep God at a (reasonable) distance.
Yes, it is very hard to acknowledge before God the places of our lives that need
washing and healing.
Because it's humiliating somehow.
But it's like when you're at the doctor, you see.
The last place you want to be touched is the one you really should let the doctor have a look at.
But it just looks so trivial and so stupid – no need to mention it.
It's also so scary.

How often do we pray about what actually occupies most of our thoughts all day long?
Fears, desires, disappointments, hopes, mood swings.
Most often, we just don't.
Because it is hard to let God see how poor and weak and needy we are.

God wants to take care of us but as for Peter, it is hard for us to let him do so.
Because we have our own pride,
and we are ashamed too.
Yet, if we do not let God take care of us we will have no share with him,
as Jesus reminds the disciple.
Because what we call details is actually what our lives are made of:
bitterness, dreams, tiredness, shame and fear, happy and complicated relationships.
Jesus tells us that we need to let God clean
and wash and visit the places in ourselves we would not show.
These places that are dirty or silly, the places that hurt, the places we don't even want to think about.

Yet today, as we are stripping the altar, putting aside rites, music and liturgy,
God comes closer.
God comes closer.
We remember we are all naked in front of God, as were Adam and Eve.
Bare.
As were Peter's feet.

*Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known,
and from you no secrets are hid.
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy Name.
Through Christ, our Lord.*

That's right. We need to be cleansed.

But today Jesus tells us something else too.
He tells us also that we should not be humiliated, because he is not humiliated.
He is humble.
It is beautiful the washing of the feet is the last thing Jesus does on this earth.
Jesus is going to die,
He is going to save the world as we say— important things he has to do.
And yet, the last thing he wants to do on earth is to wash his disciples' feet.

It is easy to believe that with the washing of the feet Jesus does something
he does not really want to do,
something a little disgusting, but he would do it anyway to make an example.
Well, I don't think so.
Yes, Jesus is making an example for all of us,
but there is more to that.
I think Jesus wants to do something that a lot of dying people want to do:
He wants to touch the ones he loves.
What would you do if you were to die tomorrow?
Well, you'd probably have a last meal with your family and friends,
and you would hug them, and kiss them, and tell them you love them.
Jesus is not different from us.
Jesus needs to touch his disciples one last time,
Jesus needs to feel his disciples' presence
and to do something kind to them, to honor them,
and as he does so
He brings them closer, in communion with him, in communion with God
And he cleanses them.

With Jesus, we learn that God is not indifferent and God is not disgusted.
God does not judge us from heaven above
rolling his eyes and sighing.
He loves us.
He sees us and wants to touch us,
and you would take into your hands a wounded bird fallen from the tree.

We remember today the first Eucharist.

Thérèse de Lisieux used to say showing the host:

“I cannot be afraid of a God who made himself so small for me”.

This humble God needs us to be humble as he is
not so that he may display his majesty
but so we may allow him to touch us,
to clean us,
to love us and to make it possible for us to love another.

In the first passover story, the whole point was to hope that God will not come in
put a mark on your door so God will leave you alone
– afraid as the Hebrews were of God's judgment and ashamed by their own sins.
Well, Jesus rewrites a whole different passover story,
where the whole point is to let God in.

The whole point of the Eucharist, and of Christian life, is to let God in.
Jesus made himself so humble and so small,
so we have a chance to let God in.

In the midst of the violence, fears and misunderstandings,
we can struggle to find God.
I think we need to remind us constantly that God is among us as the one who loves
And that this love, indeed, is the important thing God wants to be doing.
If we let him, if we let him in.
If we enter the communion.

Amen.