

“What shall we return to the Lord?
This, that we are children
of your servant girl.” AMEN!

“I’m a fool to do your dirty work, oh yeah.
I don’t want to do your dirty work. No more.”

You may recognize those lyrics from
the refrain from Steely Dan’s hit song from 1972.

The song refers to a continued
marital transgressions between a man
and a married woman.

From the point of view of the guy,
it explains how he feels powerless to cease
the behavior.

As he calls himself the “fool” in participating
in the dirty work of adultery.

And while this destructive act
by both adults, at first, seems
quite far from a connection
to our Maundy Thursday gospel,

it is good to remember that the act of adultery

is mentioned many times in the Bible.

And most of those times,
especially in the prophetic writings,
adultery is reference to the way

God's people cheat (commit adultery) not
with each other but with God.

The "adulterous affairs" often
spoken in the Bible, point to the ones
we have with money gods, promiscuity gods
status gods, and pride gods.

All of those "small g" gods, we get ourselves
tangled up in, and devote ourselves toward.

Those transgressions bring us to commit adultery
with the One True God.

So with the truth of our sin there
in front of our eyes we might resign
to call ourselves "the fool" in the song, right?

That we are fools to be doing
the dirty work of adulterous acts against God.

Maybe...

But I think there's something even clearer for us to notice here.

While we can call ourselves "fools" to join ourselves in these ways, it is perhaps even more correct, mature even, to put the words in Jesus' mouth.

Surely he looked around at his disciples, his experience with humans and at all of us and wondered if he was THE Fool.

How many of us, would be able (or willing) to do what Jesus did?

Was the Savior of the world a fool to do the dirty work?

Peter sure thought so.

"You'll never wash my feet," he stated.

He said this not because he was embarrassed of his feet!

But that he held Jesus to a higher standard than foot washer.

John's gospel sets the scene for us and

we find ourselves forced to make a choice.

Either the Jesus way or the way of the world.
Which way do you choose? Which way will I choose?

(Pause)

Notice the whole scene takes place at night.

The situation of “darkness” adds to the duality
that is so significant in John.

The night time is not a safe time in John.

Added to the imagery are the familiar
contrasts between sight and blindness.

We also get the contrast between the
activity of Satan countered to
the actions of Jesus.

We are told about Satan’s entrance into Judas
as clearly as we are told about Judas’
receipt of the piece of bread from Jesus.

Having his feet washed and then fed by Jesus,
Judas departs to go do his dirty work. (Pause)

Maybe it should occur to us that if Judas is a fool

to do the dirty work of the devil then so too
is Jesus for doing the dirty work of God.

But, Jesus' dirty work was the kind which
brings eternal life to humankind.

Still, a fool, is a fool, is a fool...

Jesus' example of foolishness, though,
demonstrated how
“something expected... love...

while added with something unexpected...humiliation...

could work together to reverse
the effect of evil in the world.” (Bashaw)

Commentator Jennifer Bashaw wrote it quite
lovely, I think, when she said that

while “preachers love to clarify that the task of
washing feet fell to lowly servants,
it is more accurate to say that it was
usually performed by lowly **female**
servants.

As much as it pains me,” she writes,
“as a woman commentator to say it,
the fact that Jesus takes on the task of

a female servant is extra humiliating,
especially in the eyes of
the [male] disciples.” (Pause)

Jesus’ “extra” foolish act of love and humiliation
are the central lesson that he taught
the disciples and the foolish act
teaches us tonight, too.

Foolish to humans is the mystery
that “eating of this bread and the drinking of
this cup proclaims the Lord’s death
until he comes.”

Yet, there’s God’s power in that.

At the beginning of Paul’s letter to
the church in Corinth, you’ll remember,

that “the message about the cross is foolishness
to those who are perishing, but to us who
are being saved it is the power of God.”

Foolishness to those perishing and
power of God to those saved. (Pause)

Tonight, instead of a foot washing service
we are invited to a healing service.

Both recognize the truth of our powerlessness.

This is the beginning of wisdom, though.

Let this be an evening that brings both
healing and authenticity.

Nothing about tonight is about achievement
nor is tonight about climbing a ladder.

The spiritual mystic, Richard Rohr, writes that
when we recognize that our egos lead us astray,

[and] when we let ourselves admit powerlessness,
we can then “fall upward.”

This is the way of growth and the
way of learning properly.

When we admit how we fail to love everyday,
behold God’s put us on a path of love
and we fall upward.

It comes not of our own doing but of
remaining close to Jesus by admitting
our narcissism and our smug statements
about being good Christians, and

with self-satisfying pats on the back,

we check off tally marks noting church
attendance and achievements about
reading the Bible in a year...

Yet never do these bring us to falling upward.

Tonight, and in this Holy Week,
find yourself overcoming these stumbling blocks
by beginning with your own powerlessness.

It is the genius of the 12 steps.

They situate people in the powerlessness
and surrender right at the beginning and
then go from there.

AMEN!