

“O Lord, we are your servants;
we are your servants,
children of your serving girl.” AMEN!

We don't want to be servants.

The word in the untranslated text is
“doulos” and it means “slave.”

Our Bibles translate it to the English word “servant,”
to soften the blow, a bit.

But the fact of the matter is,
we wish not to be servants.

It goes against our American exceptionalism,
especially if you're a white male.

How is it that a person's skin color and gender
should matter so much?

It really doesn't.

Well, I think that one answer to that question
could be that we don't want to be servants
or slaves because we've seen what it
does to people.

We've also seen the ways people in power
fight like hell to not become a servant.

And sometimes those who
fight the call to servanthood,
do so in the most vicious ways imaginable
and even call themselves Christian!

(Pause)

During the penitential season of Lent, and
moving into tonight, we've heard
the sermons where we focused on the feet.

Upon reading these texts tonight,
I am struck by Jesus' willingness
to become servant.

He took the form of a "doulos" or slave
to perform an action that provided guidance
to his followers.

That word "doulos" gives us the root
to the word "doula."

A doula, as you probably know,
is a woman, often times without formal training,
who is employed to provide guidance
and support to a pregnant woman
during labor.

A doula's role, though, is larger than only
the responsibility during childbirth,

as they're often gifted with helpful advice
and guidance prior to the labor,
as well as post-delivery care
for mother and child.

A doula is not afraid to get messy and
authentic using their intuition and
real life experiences to perform
their servant work in caring for
mother and child. (Pause)

Jesus got messy and real in the
upper room that night, too.

Birthing and bringing to life an
understanding of God they'd
never expected.

The followers of Jesus had carried out
their directions to have a place
(the upper room) and prepare the food
before the Passover Meal.

I wonder if they thought they'd be doing
some strategic planning about how they'd

rally the crowd to a revolt that would
lead Israel to take back the land
from the Romans.

Was Peter sharpening his sword?

Was Judas Iscariot planning to use
the “common purse” money from collections
to buy more weapons or hire battle experts?

That’s what the warrior would do.

It would probably be something I’d do. (Pause)

What happened when they instead witnessed
Jesus take off his outer robe and
tie a towel around himself and
become a slave and perform an
act of pure love?

Surely they were all thinking
the same things as Peter.

It was just that Peter was quoted for speaking up.

“Lord, you will never, ever, wash my feet.”

It wasn’t because he was
embarrassed about his feet.

It wasn't because he'd already washed his feet
before the meal.

It was because he couldn't imagine
that Jesus would take the form of a slave.

I bet he thought, "Surely, this is a test!"

Did they think, if we let Jesus wash our feet
then he'll think that we think we are better
than him!

We get that, don't we,
we are unworthy of such an
outpouring of love from the one
we regard as Lord of heaven and earth.

And in our minds Peter was right,
Jesus' actions were improper.

But, "proper" can very often be wrong.

When we choose to be proper, sometimes,
we fail to miss the gravity of the situation.

Jesus was patient, even in the midst of
his troubled heart, and finally Peter got it

when Jesus said,
“Unless I wash you, you have
no share with me.”

Jesus, like a doula here,
guided and supported Peter in
becoming transformed.

It happened when Jesus reminded him
that to be “in share” with Jesus implied a piece,
or a portion that he and the other followers,

and even each one of us
are co-contributors with Jesus and
with one another.

We get there by allowing Jesus to wash our feet
the way a servant might have
in a different time and a different place.

And then, since we are co-contributors or
co-sharers with Jesus, and then
we are called to do the same service
for others. (Pause)

On that night, Jesus did all the giving and
the disciples did all of the taking.

But there was more to it, wasn't there?

That “more” is what transforms us.

What Jesus did that night,
in the midst of a meal, makes us know
how much God loves and values humanity.

All humanity... all creation.

We become transformed in that knowing.

Then, we are called to do the same kind of
loving and valuing and serving of humanity.
(Pause)

The gravity of the situation is best described
by when the loved one climbs into bed
with the loved one who is dying.

When I entered the room there was
a momentary feeling of embarrassment
until we recognized it was perfectly improper
to lay next to the one you love
at such a time.

The gravity of the situation called for impropriety.

As I took my place at the foot of the hospital bed
and rubbed the feet of the one dying it was

as if I had a share with Jesus' servanthood.
(Pause)

When I think of Jesus washing, drying, and
rubbing the disciple's feet in the upper room,

I think of rubbing my own father's feet and
realize what a gift it is to perform such a service.
(Pause)

There's gravity in the action of sacrificial love,
we can't miss it.

Tonight, instead of washing feet
we have a healing service
with the anointing of oil.

It's appropriate for us to know we too are
anointed to go and serve.

Let the oil and the sign of the cross renew you
to an abundant mind and generous heart.

You are loved and saved and
an you are a member of the Body of Christ
ready to bring about actions of service.

AMEN!