

The Lenten Journey

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John 13:1-5

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

Reflection or story: *Washing feet during a pandemic*

In a year in which we have been incessantly washing our hands and staying distanced from one another, it is interesting to reflect on this text of Jesus' washing his disciples' feet and to think about what message his example has for us today in the midst of a pandemic.

We know that washing feet was a task relegated to slaves or women and so when Jesus quietly poured water into a basin and washed the dust and dirt off the feet of his disciples, he was radically subverting the social norms of the day. In this humble act of kindness, of love and selflessness, Jesus modeled a ministry of self-giving love and mutuality that he wanted his disciples and us to follow.

In Chile, where I have worked with the EPES health care ministry for almost 40 years, poor communities have been hit especially hard during the pandemic. Increased unemployment made it difficult for working-class families to make ends meet and put food on their tables during winter months of strict quarantine.

In response, our staff and the community health promoters we train, helped launch community soup kitchens, taught bread making and community gardening online and accompanied many families with prayers and support as they faced the death of family members due to Covid. I was so moved by the community health promoters who put aside their own fear of infection to help prepare food for hundreds of people who received their only hot meal from the soup kitchens. Our technology-savvy, younger staff members spent many hours helping the community health promoters learn how to get connected to *zoom* with their cell phones so they would not be isolated and could connect to group meetings, classes and gatherings. We also denounced a health system that so unfairly provides excellent care for the wealthy and substandard care for the poor.

As Christians we are called to be co-creators of a more just future, especially in the midst of the suffering and uncertainty ravaging our world since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Although social distancing makes it impossible to literally wash someone else's feet today, I think our examples of feet washing are the actions we take to walk with the most vulnerable and marginalized communities and families in need; in loving our neighbors and having the courage to stand up to systems that discriminate and oppress.

During this Lenten season, may we ask ourselves who are the most vulnerable in our community and how can we support them both in their immediate needs and in the long-term work to create a more just society.

God of mercy and self-giving love let us serve you by taking concrete actions to walk alongside the communities and families most in need during this time of pandemic.