

*Now 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.*

*34I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.*

I'd like to invite you to listen in on a phone conversation I'm waiting to have:

*Ring.*

"Hi Bill. I certainly did not expect a call from you. How are things going at the White House?"

*(Pause)*

"I bet you are busy."

*(Pause)*

"Food's good, I'm sure glad for that."

*(Pause)*

"The reason you called? Yes, I am kind of curious."

*(Pause)*

"You want to stop by this afternoon and wash my car? And wax it? You? I hardly know what to say."

So much for fantasy: Whatever might happen tomorrow, I'm sure President Clinton will not be calling me to wash and wax my car. The president is waited upon, worked for, served. Why I might even pay to have the chance to wash the president's car.

Yet tonight we remember a moment far less likely than a president washing a citizen's car. We remember the only Son of God, down on his knees, washing the feet of twelve disciples - servant's work - slave's work - the one through whom all things were created washing feet.

"Do you know what I have done to you?" Jesus asked them. "You call me teacher and Lord, and you are right for that is what I am. So if I your Lord and teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."

All of this was happening at the time when Jesus and all the people were celebrating their meal of freedom: The Passover. One thousand, two hundred years before that Passover, the Israelites had all been washing feet, and making bricks and doing whatever their masters commanded in the land of Egypt - slaves, until the first Passover.

But on that night, as they shared the lamb and as the angel of death struck down the firstborn of the Egyptians, they were set free. Free, never to be slaves again.

At the very moment to celebrate freedom from slavery, Jesus took the part of a slave, and washed the disciples' feet. He invited them to enter the very same bondage of service that he had chosen.

What a way to use his freedom, washing feet like a slave, dying on a cross like a criminal - pouring out his life for those he loves.

Jesus died for Peter and James and John, and for you.

Jesus told his disciples: "Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

Sometimes we think Jesus gave himself for us so that we could live for ourselves - serve ourselves - worship ourselves. But in these words Jesus calls us to the same service that he gave. We are not called to be greater than Jesus, but like him in giving ourselves.

Jesus said, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

In many churches tonight, pastors and priests will act out the part of Jesus. With basin and towel they will wash the feet of a few, acting out humility.

And some people will think, "Wasn't it great to see him down on his knees instead of up on his high horse."

But on that night before Jesus was crucified, he was not initiating a little ceremony to be copied, but pointing to a way of life - not only for pastors and priests, but for the whole Christian church on earth.

Like our Lord, we are given the freedom to become servants in love - servants of those who are seldom served, the poor, the elderly, the dying. Christ has called each and every one of us to the freedom of service.

Imagine how the world would be startled to be served by us.

As startled as the disciples were as their Lord washed their feet. Amen.