

## ACTS OF SERVICE

In John 13, we read about the night before Jesus died: It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. ***Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.***

What follows is a scene (or story) you may have never heard before, and it's a bit of an odd one, because Jesus is about to wash his disciples' feet. Which was typically the job of a very low-ranking servant. But rather than simply read the story as arm's length observers, we're going to take a few minutes to imagine ourselves into the scene. To try to catch a better glimpse of the Jesus who loves through acts of service. And... I'm going to ask you to do something that might feel a bit strange – just to help us more actively, physically immerse ourselves into the real experience of those in the story. I'm going to ask you to slip off your shoes right now (if you're wearing any). Maybe even your socks, depending on where you are. And it may feel a bit uncomfortable, but some of that's the point. To embrace the sort of uncomfortable vulnerability of the moment ahead. So go ahead and do that now, if you can.

And then I want you to close your eyes, and simply picture in your mind that first century rustic scene. Jesus is there, along with all 12 disciples, they're laughing, eating, talking. Dinner is mostly over but there is still bread and wine on the table, maybe a few leftover scraps of lamb.

The atmosphere is light; surprising, given how heavy the recent days have been. But this is a moment of celebration, of togetherness, of thanking God for his provisions of food, and friendship, and freedom.

Can you see yourself, reclining at the table with the disciples? Hear the clink of the dishes, the smell of roasted lamb still lingering in the air?

How does it feel to be here, in Jesus' inner circle? Who is seated beside you? What else can you see as you look around the room?

Out of the corner of your eye, you notice Jesus get up from the table and begin to remove his cloak, and then his outer robe. Conversation around the table slowly stills as all eyes fix on his confusing movements. He pours clean water into a nearby basin, picks up a servant's towel, and then turns back towards the table, his eyes coming to rest on yours. What do you feel, as he looks at you?

Crossing the room, Jesus then sits down in front of you, sets the bowl on the floor, and holds his hand out expectantly. He wants to wash your feet.

Can you see it? Can you imagine this, as if it were happening right now? What is your gut reaction to the scene? Does it cause any internal resistance?

In the first century of course, your feet would be caked with dirt, dust, grime and sweat. Can you picture Jesus kneeling on the floor in front of you, wanting to take those stinky dirty feet in his hands, to gently massage them with soap and water, over and over and over again, until you are clean?

Should Jesus do this, for you?

Does something about it feel 'not right' – Jesus being the important one, should you be in opposite positions? Do you prefer everybody in 'their proper place'? But there is Jesus, kneeling and washing... erasing every trace of hierarchy.

Does it make you feel too vulnerable, to be served so intimately? Do you prefer to be the capable one? The strong one? The one in control?

Would you feel embarrassed to have your mess in anyone else's hands? Embarrassed to be seen that closely? To accept help, in getting it cleaned up?

How much of this is true in your regular life? Would you rather hide your messiness, from people – from God – rather than bring it out in the open, and say my feet are dirty, I need some help?

What causes you to resist this kind of tender care from Christ? (The kind he's holding out, every single day.)

Take a minute to just allow yourself to sit in the vulnerability, and the tenderness of that love Jesus is offering you in this moment.

Periodically Jesus shoots a look up at you, in which his eyes seem to say: This is what love looks like. Are you watching? Are you paying attention? Give me what's messy, grungy, broken, and let me hold it, with you, and then let me heal it. Not with greatness and power, but by stripping off everything that looks important, and taking the humble posture of a servant. Because this is what love looks like.