

Easter - Meeting Jesus

Jesus washes the disciples' feet

Foundation

Bible passage : John 13.1-17

In the UK today people may have different customs about what visitors should do when they visit. Some will ask visitors to remove their shoes, others may not. In some cultures the hosts will provide visitors with slippers to wear.

In the Old and New Testament of the Bible we see that people either went barefoot or wore sandals because of the warm climate. They would get dusty and dirty feet and the custom was to wash their feet either on entering a home or before eating. The bit about eating might seem strange but generally reclined to eat, so their feet were not tucked under a table.

In Luke 7 when a stir was caused by a woman washing Jesus feet with her tears and hair Jesus commented that his guest, a Pharisee, had not offered Jesus water before the meal to wash His own feet. In more well-to-do households the task of washing feet was given to a household servant or slave and was therefore seen as a menial task, though possibly a host might wash the feet of an important visitor.

With all this cultural background it was therefore shocking that early in the Last Supper Jesus himself stripped off His outer clothes and put on a towel, in the manner of a slave, and began to wash the feet of the disciples. The shock can be seen in Peter's response. If anything, it should have been one of the disciples washing Jesus' feet, but we have seen in previous units how at this stage the disciples were concerned about their individual reputations and which of them was the greatest.



Jesus went on to use His example to teach them. In verse 14 He said that they ought to wash one another's feet, and that He had given them an example to follow. But what should that mean in practice?

Some have seen this as a command to follow in a foot washing ritual, a bit like we follow his command later in the meal to "do this" with bread and wine. Where it has been done the danger has been for it to just become a ritual rather than an opportunity to think about the important lesson of Jesus that lay behind it.

Mostly people have said that Jesus was not leaving a ritual to be followed, but an example to be learned from and put in practice in other ways. Within a few weeks Jesus would have ascended to heaven leaving the disciples without a master. If they were to jostle for position and worry about who was the greatest they would fall apart. Instead they were to be concerned not for themselves but for one another, and for others, and so follow the example of Jesus.

"I have given you an example"



In a very memorable and practical way Jesus showed his followers how to behave, being ready to serve others.