

In a few moments I'll be inviting you to come forward and have your feet washed. I know already you've got your mind made up. Some of you are saying, "No way I'm going up there. Take my shoes and socks off in public? I don't think so." Others are like, "Well, OK, it's Holy Week. Whatever." And kids can hardly wait to go barefoot in church. We have the same range of opinions here tonight that Jesus had at the Last Supper. We know it because John reports the reaction of one of the disciples, Peter. Peter respected Jesus as the teacher of the group, but Peter also corrected Jesus whenever he thought the master had gotten a little off his rocker. For example, when Jesus called Peter to be a disciple, he responded, "Leave me, Lord;" when Jesus predicted his passion, Peter rebuked him; and when Jesus said Peter would deny him three times? "Nope," said Peter. Not gonna happen."

So at the Last Supper, when Jesus starts washing feet, Peter says no. No. "You will never wash my feet." His motives are mixed; he believes that Jesus is the Son of God who deserves respect, but Peter can't keep his hands off the steering wheel; he wants the Son of God to act in a certain way, and Peter will not cooperate if Jesus won't follow the script. Jesus finally convinces him that this washing is necessary to share in the inheritance Jesus offers. Then Peter wants it all; "Don't stop at my feet."

The washing of the feet is probably an allusion to baptism. If we want to have the inheritance Jesus offers, we need to be washed; and in baptism, Jesus cleanses us. When you have your feet washed tonight, you indicate that you want to share in the inheritance Jesus promises you. It is natural to feel as Peter did – "not my feet"; in fact, if we had been there at the time, we probably would have said the other things Peter said to Jesus. "You want me as your disciple? No, no thanks. I'm not worthy of that." "You want to suffer for me? Oh no, please don't. I don't want to be a burden on anyone." "Me deny you? You don't have to worry about that. I would never commit any sin." We are very much like Peter. We don't always accept what Jesus knows we need and what he wants to do.

Jesus made two specific requests of his disciples in this ceremony. He asked them to receive the footwashing, and he asked them to give it to others. The same is true of the meal that followed. He asked his disciples to eat and drink, and then to do this in his memory. Tonight we celebrate an event that centers our life as Christians, the night that Jesus handed over his own body and blood for us as food, and the night he washed feet.

He expects two things of us: to receive and to do. Sometimes we refuse another person's help because we tell ourselves it's the polite thing to do. But it may also be we don't want to admit we need help; we don't want to look more deeply inside ourselves, to see how much other people can do for us, and how incomplete we are without the service of people who love us. Sometimes we need to receive another person's help because their action will teach us humility, and it will inspire us to do for others what they do so well for us.