

One of the things my sisters and I loved to do as children was play dress up in our grandmother's clothes. We would don her fancy blouses, which were a perfect dress-length for us, and drape ourselves in her jewelry – lots of it. These dress up days were usually accompanied by intricate story lines extracted and expanded from one of our favorite TV shows at time. To my grandmother's credit – or folly – I do not recall her ever limiting our use of her wardrobe for such imaginative play. In fact, I recall many a fashion show to display our elaborate designs from her temporarily re-purposed wardrobe items. And of course, no outfit was complete until it was accessorized with the perfect shoe. We would slip our feet into her fancy high heels and then wobble and stumble around making an excess of noise as the heels clunked and dragged against the hard wood floor. It was always more than a bit precarious walking around in those shoes, but we felt so elegant as we weebled and wobbled around in our make-believe world.

Without knowing what we were doing, that was our first experience walking in someone else's shoes.

We all know the idiom – to walk in someone else's shoes – as a reminder to be empathetic, to try to see the world through someone else's eyes, to imagine experiencing the world in someone else's skin lest we succumb to the judgment that is so often lurking at the surface of our lives. But have you ever really tried to walk in someone else's shoes – I mean literally walk in someone else's shoes – beyond playing dress up as a child? It's not easy, even when the shoes are your same size. Our feet are sort of like fingerprints – no two are exactly the same. Some of our feet are wide, some are short, some are long, narrow. Our gaits are different, and our

shoes have unique wear patterns. Wearing someone else's shoes is awkward and sometimes every bit as precarious as a child stumbling along in a grown-ups high heels.

Each year on Maundy Thursday Jesus invites us to do something akin to walking in each other's shoes by washing each other's feet, and in so doing we are reminded what precarious and precious work this is. I said on Sunday as we were gathering in the courtyard before the Palm Sunday service that Holy Week is an invitation to enter fully into Jesus' suffering so that we might enter into the suffering of the world. We do that by walking the way of the cross with him, by following in his footsteps no matter where they may take us, even when they take us to the depths of denial, betrayal, and heart-wrenching loss. We follow in Jesus' footsteps.

And along the way of the cross, Jesus brings us into the most intimate of moments with his closest companions and followers. He gets up from the table, kneels before his disciples and begins to wash their feet even over Peter's strenuous objections until he finally has some vague notion that to deny Jesus this might mean losing him forever. Jesus assures them that none of it need make sense in this moment. "You don't understand what I am doing now, but you will understand later," he says. "Whether you know what I am doing or not, I have given you an example; just as I have done, you also must do. If I have washed your feet, you must also wash each other's feet. This is how you show that you love one another."

Our feet carry the stories of our lives, and while those stories may not be written on the surface, when we wash each other's feet, we enter into each other's stories in the mysterious way of God. We share them, tend them, we hold them, we bless them, and we do all this from a gesture not of

power and privilege, but of selflessness and humility. We are invited – no commanded – to take off judgment and self-righteousness, status and control. We take off our own agendas, our need to be right, our compulsion to fix. We take this all off just like we take off our shoes, and we enter into each other's stories realizing that walking in each other's shoes is precarious and precious business because no two stories are exactly alike.

Over the years we have pretty much spiritualized our Maundy Thursday ritual footwashing into an optionally-enacted symbolic gesture for Christian love and service. But I'm not sure there's anything optional about Jesus' commandment, and I'm not sure it can be relegated to a symbolic gesture. I wonder if this is one of the times we are meant to take the bible literally – to take off our shoes, get down on our hands and knees, and wash each other's feet.

This doesn't make logical sense. It's not meant to make logical sense. We're meant to let our bodies and our hearts do for us what our minds can not and maybe even will no do. And when we do, when we give ourselves fully over to the awkward gestures and uncomfortable contact with one another, when we do so with selflessness and humility, we open ourselves to the possibility – to the promise – that something might just happen to us in the process. That we might just make contact with the mysterious place in the depths of our being that touches God's very being and breaks open our hearts more and more to each other and to the world that God loves beyond measure.