

A Sermon by the Rev. Jeffrey A. Packard	Prepared for the congregation of Christ Episcopal Church, Spotsylvania, VA
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Submitting to God's Love

Jesus knelt at the feet of his friends and washed their feet. We have the record of Peter's reaction, which is near terror at the thought of his teacher and Lord washing his feet. We can assume that the other disciples were equally uncomfortable with the idea. This action, which was not even expected of one's slave, was the ultimate in humility for Jesus. Not only was it an act of humility, but for Jesus to wash the feet of his disciples was truly the enactment of his words, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve."

I think most of us are a little more comfortable with the idea of us being Jesus' servants than the other way around. I know for myself that if I had been there, I would have been much like Peter in my response, "Lord, you will never wash my feet." I bet everyone here considers him or herself a servant of Jesus. We would never presume to say that Jesus is our servant. And yet, he knelt at the feet of his friends and washed their feet.

I think that part of the reason we are so uncomfortable with the idea of Jesus being our servant—apart from the obvious *ookiness* of someone touching our feet—is that there is an inherent control factor when we are the servant. What I mean is, as the identified servant, we have control over how we serve Jesus and our fellow humans. We can serve in ways that are most comfortable for us. That doesn't mean that we never go outside of our comfort zone, but we do so on our own terms usually. Allowing someone to serve us means that we give up a certain amount of control. It's the same dynamic that makes doctors and nurses such bad patients. In order to be a patient, you must give up control. The one who normally provides the care is used to being the one in control. To be sure, there is submission in being a servant of

Jesus, but perhaps the sense of submission is greater when we submit to Jesus' ministry to us. I wonder if that is what Peter is reacting to. I wonder if that is what we react to.

What would our lives be like if we submitted to all that Jesus wants to do for us, to all that Jesus wants to give us? Think about how we pray. We usually spend our time telling God what God should be doing, asking for ourselves, and for others, what we see as best for us, or them. How did Jesus teach us to pray? "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Isn't that the way he prayed in the garden just before he was arrested? "Not my will but yours be done." Do we not trust God? Does God not want all good things for us? Does God not know better than we ourselves what is best for us? Maybe it's time we learned to trust in God's wisdom and love. But maybe there's more than just trust and control at stake here. Maybe we don't believe that we deserve the good things God wants for us.

Is that it? Are we so convinced that we are so bad, so depraved that we actually deserve God's fury, God's wrath, God's punishment, rather than God's loving care? God sent Jesus to us precisely because he did not want to punish us, but because his love for us would not allow us to live, or die, without him. Not only did God create us with love, creating us in his own image, giving us the potential to be loving ourselves, but God was willing to give up his divinity in a way, to enter into our limited existence to demonstrate for us the depth of that love. God's son showed us the extent to which God was willing to go to save us from our tendency to go against God's perfect will. He humbled himself for our sake, humbled himself to become our servant, humbled himself to death, even death on a cursed cross. Who are we to question whether we deserve that? Who are we to question God's choice to love us beyond our faults and failures? Who are we to question our own salvation? God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.

Jesus knelt at the feet of his friends and washed their feet. They were uncomfortable with the role reversal, but finally they were willing to submit to his tender act of servitude to them, his beautiful demand for their trust. They were ashamed of the dirt which they bore, but finally they accepted his unconditional love; they realized that his eyes saw beyond the dirt to the goodness that even they themselves couldn't see.

Jesus knelt at the feet of his friends and washed their feet. He told them that they didn't know what he was doing then, but that later they would understand. Later they watched him dying on a cross, and they wondered if they understood. Was his love that great? Were they truly worth all that? All they knew for sure was that they could never thank him enough.

Amen.