

On this Maundy Thursday, I actually want to start with a story, a story that you probably all know, but we hear it at a different time of year, at Christmas time, and that is the story of Good King Wenceslas. He was a King of Bohemia, what is now the modern Czech Republic. Lived about 1000 years ago. But he's noted for especially, on the day after Christmas, looking out of his window and seeing out there a poor man gathering sticks. Now, it was very cold that day. I mean, after all, it was the middle of winter. And he took pity on this poor man. And so he called to him his servant, by the name of Podevin, and he asked him where this poor man lived. And once he found that out, he did a very remarkable thing. He told Podevin, "Go, gather together some of my own logs and some of my own food and bring it here, because you and I are going to go together to give these things to this poor man." And that is exactly what he did. But it was a remarkable thing for him to do that. Because honestly, he had servants. He could have sent somebody else to do it. This was pretty menial kind of work, the kind of work that you can have somebody else do. But this king, King Wenceslas, laid aside his crown and, taking up the wood for that fire, carried it out those several miles to go and to help this poor man.

And in fact, the day was so cold that day that even before they got all the way there, Podevin said to him, "I can't go any further. The wind is too much. The cold is too much. I need to go back." But Wenceslas turned to him and said, "Walk in my footsteps, my boy, and you will find the way. God will take care of us." That is exactly what they did. Because [Podevin], following after his master, walking in those footsteps, made it all the way there, because Wenceslas was also walking in someone's footsteps, the footsteps of his Lord Jesus Christ.

Because think about what is going on in our text for today, Christians. Jesus is the king of all creation. Jesus is the one who has all things under his feet. But now on that Thursday so long ago, Jesus rises from supper, and he puts on a towel, and he begins to wash the feet of his disciples. This was slave's work. This was not the kind of thing that Jesus should be doing. This was the work of somebody who was beneath you. At the very best, maybe someone who was your equal who then could do it as a sign of love, but for a teacher to wash his disciples feet? For a Lord to wash the feet of his servants? It was unheard of. And so it's no wonder then that Peter reacts to this. He says to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet? This is all backwards, Jesus! You shouldn't be washing my feet. I should be washing yours. I should be taking care of you." Just as John had said so long ago, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" It's all messed up. It's all backwards. This isn't the way it's supposed to be. But Jesus tells him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand. After all of these things have happened, you will understand why I have done this." But Peter still doesn't get it. He says, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answers him, "If I don't wash you, you will have no part with me."

Because what Peter doesn't understand, Christians, is that Jesus shows here in this moment the very reason why he has come. Jesus shows what it means for him to come into the world, not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Because on that Thursday, so long ago, Jesus was giving them a picture, a picture of what he had come to do. And that picture, dear Christians, was this: the king of all creation, the one who had all things under his feet, has become like one of us. He has become a servant. He has lowered himself so that we might be saved. Yes, dear Christians, Jesus would go that very next day, on Good Friday, and he would take his own wood, the wood of that cross, and he would walk to Golgotha where he would be crucified like a criminal. The very king of all creation has lowered himself so far, so that we would be delivered from our sins. That is what Jesus has come to do. And he shows it in this small way in this moment by serving his disciples in this servile, humble way.

Now Peter, to his credit, starts to understand a little bit. Peter says to him, "Well, if that's the case, Lord,

don't just wash my feet, but wash my head and my hands too! Wash all of me, so that I might have a part in you!" But even with his enthusiasm, he still doesn't quite understand. Because Jesus says to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean." What Jesus has done for us is not something that needs to be repeated over and over and over again the way that we wash ourselves. But we have been washed in the blood of Jesus once and for all. And because we have been washed in the blood of Jesus, we have been set free. Yes, we need to be forgiven. Yes, we stumble and fall. Yes, we still have sins. But the truth is, Christians, that that once for all sacrifice of Jesus at Golgotha has washed away every single one of our sins, so that we now belong to God. That is the glory that we have on this day, Christians. We have been made like Jesus, because Jesus who washed his disciples' feet with water has also washed us with his own blood. So we now belong to Him.

And if we belong to Him and are a new creation in him, should we not also be like Him in the things that he has done? If he has washed our feet and washed us in His own blood, becoming a servant for us, why do we cling to our pride? Why do we cling to our self importance? Jesus has given us an example to follow, to follow him to Golgotha, walking in his own blood-stained footsteps, along with Wenceslas, along with [Podevin], along with all of the saints in every time and place, walking to the cross to be crucified with him, so that we would die with him and rise again with him to new life. Yes, dear Christians, we are His. And we have been made new. So let us go with him this day on Maundy Thursday, to die with him on Good Friday, so that we might rise with him again on Easter Sunday.

To him who is both true God and true man, our Lord Jesus Christ, who has the name that is above every name, be all glory, honor and worship, now and forever. Amen.