

“Lent”

March 2009

Hymn “You servants of God” VU 342

Scripture *“When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do what I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”* John 13: 12 - 17

Prayer Let us pray – Gracious God, we know Jesus was lonely and tempted and yet willing to sacrifice his life for all humankind. We often feel incapable of walking the path that he followed. Help us now, as we look again at one of the final acts of his earthly life. Accept our feeble attempts at discipleship through him, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Lesson We are in the season of Lent. The word “Lent” comes from lengthening, as in the lengthening of days as spring approaches. The season of Lent lasts for forty days plus six Sundays and ends with Easter which was set by the Council of Nicea in 325 as the first Sunday after the first full moon of the spring equinox.

Lent has been traditionally a time of self-denial, of fasting and praying. It is also a time when we reflect on the last days of Jesus’ life on earth. It is a time when we wonder if we are really deserving of the name “Christian”. We wonder just how well we are doing in following the teachings of this man we call the Christ.

One of the most difficult of Jesus’ teachings for us to follow is one we read about in John’s gospel – the washing of feet. Many of us have allowed ourselves to almost “write off” this command of Jesus on the basis of the cultural and climatic conditions that no longer apply to modern society – especially modern Canadian society. We no longer wash people’s feet when they arrive at our door, nor do we have servants to do this for our guests. This allows us to ignore the symbolism of the story, which is service to others.

Some faith communities have experimented with foot washing, or have substituted hand washing. A bowl of water and a towel placed on a table while the story is being read can also be quite moving. We do not need to re-enact the foot washing – we need to think about what such a servant attitude means to us. The visual aid helps us realize what that act must have meant to the disciples. Here was their master, acting as their servant. We who claim to have no worldly master or mistress, and who are unlikely to be able to afford servants, find it difficult to appreciate this role reversal of Jesus.

There is no doubt that Christians are called to *serve*. Lent is a time when we can evaluate our service, seek new ways to serve, or be strengthened to continue the service we are doing.

Discussion In small groups, talk about ways that Christians today express their faith in action during the Lenten season. Include small actions as well as larger contributions. Be intentional in naming ways you will serve during the next few weeks.

Prayer Let us pray – O God, washing one another's feet seems such a small gesture of service, but sometimes it is difficult to accept this kindness from another person. Help us to know how to accept, and help us to know how to give, that we may follow the example of Jesus as one that serves. Amen.