

WEEK FIVE



I WILL

NURTURE & INCLUDE

Foot Washing

John 13: 1-5, 12-14, 34-35

Opening Ritual:

To begin class each week, have a cup of water and a bowl. Invite everyone to take a deep breath as the leader slowly pours the water into the bowl.

Then pray aloud:

God of Water and the Spirit,

May we be open to the new things you are doing.

Reveal to us today what it means to nurture one another and to include them in the life of the church. Amen.

Scripture Reading: John 13: 1-5, 12-14, 34-35

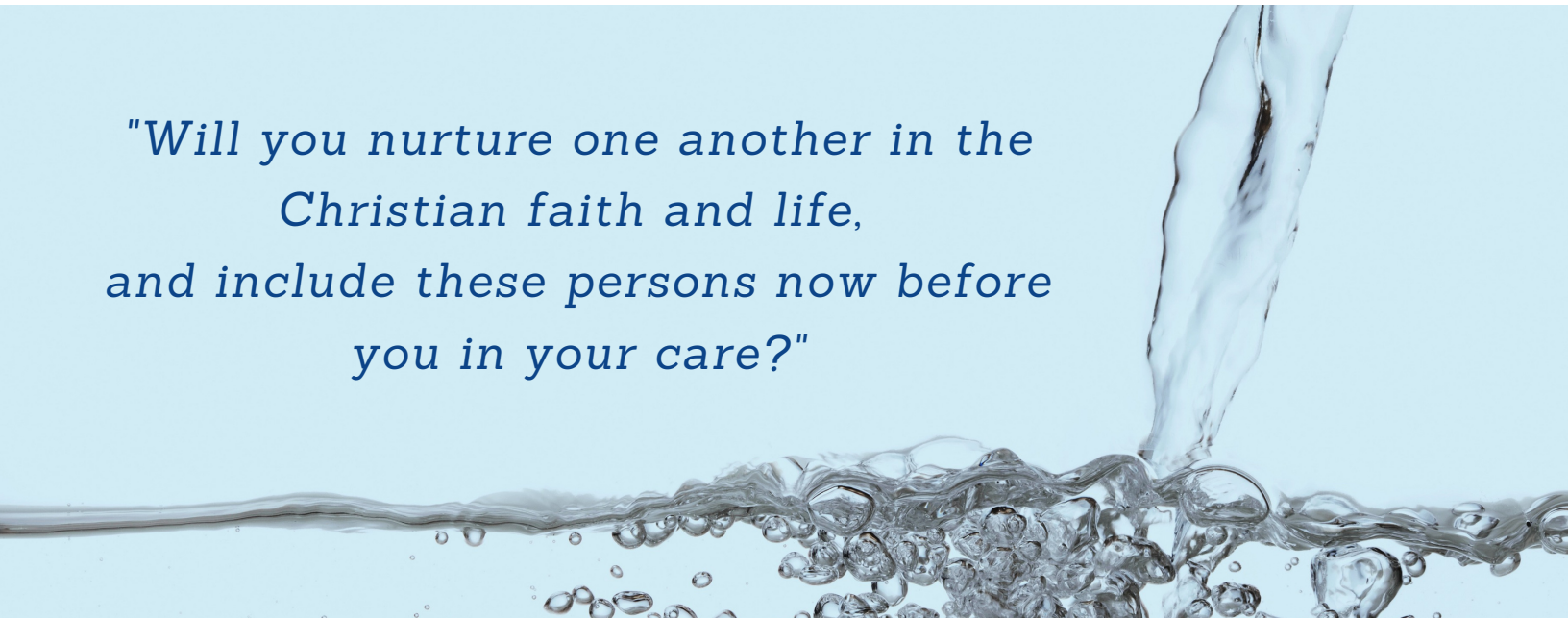
Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. **2** The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper **3** Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, **4** got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. **5** Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

12 After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? **13** You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. **14** So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. **35** By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Discussion:

- What does it mean that Jesus loved his own to the end?
- "Do you know what [Jesus] has done for you?" How do you think the disciples felt as they had their feet washed by the one they'd committed to follow?
- What does it mean to command someone to do something? So what does it realistically mean if we are commanded to love one another?



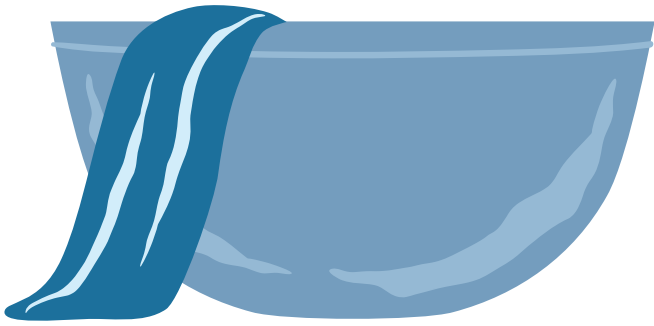
*"Will you nurture one another in the
Christian faith and life,
and include these persons now before
you in your care?"*

Pastoral Reflection:

It has always been a mystery to me why we do not practice foot washing more often in the Christian church. Since Jesus commanded his followers to do, it seems that it should be a sacrament right alongside baptism and communion. In fact, the Protestant reformers determined what was a sacrament using the criterion of whether Jesus had commanded something or not. Using this criterion, foot washing should have been included among our sacraments. Can you imagine if we had a monthly foot washing ceremony at church like we do for communion?

Unfortunately, I suspect that we would have low attendance on foot washing Sundays. I think we avoid the practice of foot washing for a number of reasons, but all of them boil down to the fact that we are simply uncomfortable with feet. Our feet are usually covered. They seem private and intimate. Our feet are not always considered the most attractive or appealing parts of ourselves, especially depending on the level of our foot care. Our feet walk on the ground

and attract dirt and grime. Our feet sometimes smell. And frankly, the idea of someone else touching our feet sometimes gives us the creeps. It makes us feel vulnerable and out of control. And yet, Jesus used this very same act to demonstrate love for the other, and he commanded his followers to do likewise. In the gospel of John, rather than the holy meal of the Last Supper, it is the foot washing that takes center stage. When churches do practice foot washing, it is most commonly during Lent on Maundy Thursday. “Maundy” comes from the Latin word *maundate* which means to mandate or command.



I will never forget the time I had the extreme privilege and honor of washing the feet of Ms. Frances. I was the lead preacher at a small United Methodist church with an average attendance of around 30-40 people. Ms. Frances was one of our oldest members, well into her upper 80's. She was a delightful human being who's smile could

light up a room, and her devotion to the church was unmatched. She attended every service we had as long as she was in good health. On Maundy Thursday, I preached on this passage from John and described the immense love that can be found in the act of serving one another through this simple act of foot washing. I don't remember exactly what I said, but apparently God worked through my words enough to convince Ms. Frances that she had to give this strange thing a try. As we began the foot washing ceremony, she approached me and said, "I've never done this in my whole life, but I want you to wash my feet." I told her I would be honored. We approached the chair and basin, she sat down and removed her shoes, and I proceeded to take her feet in my hands and began to wash. As I held her feet, rinsing them with warm water and kneading them gently, I looked up and found that she was crying tears of joy. In that moment, Ms. Frances experienced the love of God through this simple but profound act of vulnerable service. After nearly 90 years of life, Ms. Frances experienced God in a new way. She allowed herself the freedom to not care what someone else thought about her feet. She allowed me to serve her freely. And together, we experienced the presence of God and one another in a profoundly deep and spiritual way through this most strange and physical of rituals.

If you ever have the chance to participate in a foot washing ceremony, I suggest you let down your guard and give it a try. God never fails to show up powerfully in such acts of service and grace.

--- **Rev. Brandon Baxter**

Connection:

- What does it mean to nurture one another in the Christian faith and life?
- How do we make sure to include people in our care?
- Have you experienced what it means to be nurtured and included in a faith community? If so, share.
- Have you ever participated in a foot washing ceremony? If so, what was the experience like? If not, do you think you would participate if you had the chance? Why or why not?

Closing Ritual:

At the conclusion of class each week, invite everyone to stand, Then say aloud:

*Members of our Beloved Community,
Will you nurture one another the Christian faith and life,
and include people in your care?*

In response, invite each person to touch the water on their way out the door, saying **I WILL!**



I WILL

NURTURE & INCLUDE

