

"We are made clean" John 13:1-15, 34-35

Why did Christ our Lord wash the feet of His disciples?

A careful study of the text suggests that He did not do it only for one reason. Some of the reasons include that He wanted to encourage them to follow His example of brotherly love. Also, He was showing them an example of His humble spirit that they were to follow.

Rather than deal with each of these possible reasons, in this sermon I will examine one in particular. Namely, that we are to be concerned with having ourselves washed and cleaned in our spiritual life.

Christ said to Saint Peter, "Whoever has been washed only needs to wash his feet, for he is totally clean." This means that in Christ we are completely cleansed of every sin we have ever or will ever do. We do not have to be reconverted every time we commit sin. In the language of the visual analogy that Christ uses, we have taken a shower, but we still need to wash our feet if we go outside in the dirt barefoot. You do not need a whole shower just for your feet.

Yet we cannot simply ignore our feet, that is, our Christian walk. We step in spiritual dirt every day. We should not ignore that. We need to be concerned and diligent in proper foot care. We should struggle against sin, resist it with all our might, and repent and receive the cleansing of Christ.

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In other words, if you are a Christian, do not take sin lightly. Do not say, "Christ died for me, so it does not matter if I sin." Although you are forgiven, it matters very much whether you sin.

Our feet get dirty because of our hearts and minds. The most common way that we commit sin is in our thoughts and desires. Although words also leap swiftly out of our mouths before we can stop them, the hidden sins inside us are even quicker and harder to resist.

We should resist them. Stop the dirt from collecting, if you can. Discipline your thoughts as much as possible. Of course, no man can completely stop sinful urges from creeping up out of his old Adam. But do not give them permission. Do not allow them or encourage them.

This is so hard to do. Our culture wants us to think that our emotions and imagination are not sinful unless you act upon them. But Christ tells us something different. Sinful desire is sin. Simple lust or coveting or hatred stain our souls, even if we never give any visible sign of these inward trespasses.

Although we can and must struggle against these sins of heart and mind, the only true victory is found in the Gospel. A man may try to clean up his life, avoid many sins, and eventually convince himself that he is doing a pretty good job. But without the Word and Sacraments,

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all human efforts will end in failure. They may create a visible effect, but do nothing to actually cleanse the sinful heart.

So we rightly flee to the refuge that Christ provides for us. We come to this sanctuary to find rest for our weary souls. After fighting against temptation all week, we need His forgiving grace to heal us and revive us.

He proclaims His merciful Word from this pulpit, as He is doing now. Throughout the Divine Service, He makes sure that we hear His Gospel in various ways. Particularly, He speaks His forgiveness at Private Holy Absolution, where the Gospel is applied to specific, personal sins that are confessed.

Especially, we come to His Supper. Here is a meal to strengthen our tired souls for the constant battle against our own sinful flesh. In the bread and wine which are His Body and Blood we receive the reassurance that Christ still loves us and feeds us. He sees our great need and is ready to help. He cleanses us from our repulsive sins by His sacred meal.

These are ways that He washes our filthy feet. If we feel the great need for forgiveness because we are disgusted by our own sins, then we will eagerly come to His spoken Gospel. No one will have to compel

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us or urge us. We will come of our own accord. After all, what person who is concerned about hygiene would always go around with dirty, nasty feet?

If our personal sins do not matter to us anymore, then why would we receive His Gospel at all? Indeed, for most people that is not a motivation to attend worship. They want the fellowship of other believers. They want to learn something new. They want to praise God. None of these are bad motivations in themselves. But if receiving forgiveness is not a strong reason to come to the Divine Service, then we are rejecting the primary thrust of God's Gospel.

If we stop caring if we are cleansed, then we are beginning to become not only weary, but to fall asleep. A person may say, "I am already forgiven. I do not need to receive more forgiveness." But that is to say that they do not care if their spiritual feet are dirty. That is to say that a person is unconcerned about whether they are living a life pleasing to Christ in word and deed. That is to say that they do not care if they sin.

Heaven forbid that we should say that.

Instead, we should be diligent in fighting against our own sinful inclinations. Although we are fully cleansed, we still have a sinful flesh that constantly drags us into iniquity.

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May the Spirit keep us examining ourselves and working against that flesh. May He open our eyes to notice our sins, and to resist them, and to come for forgiveness.

In the Name of this true God who alone gives the victory. Amen.