

Comfortable Footwear, Maundy Thursday, April 18, 2019, St. Timothy's, Burnaby
Ex 12:1-14; Ps 116.1, 10-17; 1 Cor 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Prayer

I don't have a lot of American friends. That's not true. I have a lot of American friends. I haven't visited a lot of American friends *in America*. And I would remember it if I had because then I would know if what I see on TV is accurate or not. America is of course my model for television and movies (though so many movies and TV series are filmed here) so I think if I see it in the movies then maybe that's how things go in the US—especially when they're drastically different than what I practice here. They seem to be obsessed with football and guns in America. Is that accurate? I don't know. Many Canadians really are (just like the stereotype) obsessed with hockey. I've checked my hockey pool several times already today even though there's only been one game so far and I knew how yesterday's games ended last night.

But the one thing that I really want to know about is shoes. When you're watching TV people visit other people and then just walk into their houses *without taking their shoes off*! Is that just because it would slow down the action on the screen? Nobody has the patience to watch an extra fifteen seconds of someone taking off their shoes? Or is it because that's how people really do it? *I don't know!* And sometimes you'll see scenes of people getting into bed—undressing and then *taking their shoes off* in their bedroom just before they get into bed! Where have those shoes been? What have they walked in, all day long? *What is covering the floors of their house!?*

And as weird as it is to see people on TV with their boots on in their bedrooms, it is just as strange to see someone on a screen trying to act dignified in just their socks. Try to imagine the motivational speech delivered with argyles with a toe sticking out. It's even hard not to laugh at somebody getting angry or even violent if they're wearing oversized tube socks.

Besides Tom Cruise in *Risky Business* the movies assume that everyone wears shoes. All the time.

But in many of our personal lives, in our homes at least, shoes are too formal, too stuffy, too dirty. They present a barrier to comfort, to intimacy. And when we invite people into our homes, we want them to be comfortable. "Come in, sit down. Relax. Put your feet up!" Taking your shoes off is implied.

And some of us have living rooms with a reclining chair for all the guests. But not many of us.

And in Jesus' time people didn't have chairs so much as couches—but couches without backs. Kind of like a padded bench. Not especially comfortable to sit on, but if you could lounge around in it, well, that's a different story. But you wouldn't put your feet up on the couch, especially if you had been walking around in the dusty roads all day—and where the chances of encountering the *ahem* "leavings" of a horse, mule, or camel are much more likely than on our sidewalks. When people were welcomed into others' houses, they usually washed their feet first—or, more likely, had a servant wash their feet (if they could afford a servant)—this made reclining on cushioned benches more comfortable for everyone involved. The middle east is famous for its hospitality—and what better way to be hospitable than to make someone feel comfortable?

In our second reading Paul is addressing a community that has lost its sense of hospitality. They have been eating the Lord's Supper in an undignified way. Wealthy people have been eating large meals and

stuffing themselves at a very relaxed pace while the poor have been eating their meagre meals in relative haste as they have other work to do. This was not what Jesus intended. Paul has to remind them of the tradition that he received and that he passed on to them. That Jesus, at supper with his friends, took bread, broke it, and shared it among them. And then he did the same with the cup of wine, sharing it amongst them all. The word “communion” is useful as it refers to the sharing of the one gift—and sharing it in common. This is another way in which we make people comfortable.

But the emphasis on making people feel comfortable (and welcome and part of the group) went even further than that. It’s not just the people who can *afford* to make others feel comfortable that are called to do so—even those of us who can’t afford servants to do the lowly jobs that we don’t want to do ourselves (like cleaning dirty feet) are told to serve others. Jesus sets an example for us all—our own comfort is less important than that of others. To welcome people, all people, it will involve us coming to terms with our own *initial* discomfort. And then, as the circle grows larger, and as we see people comfortable and serving others, our discomfort lessens—our discomfort doesn’t lessen so much as it gets put in the proper context. We are called to serve others, as Jesus himself came, not to be served, but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many. And this is how we love one another, through our service of one another.

So I invite you to come up, have a seat. Relax. Put your feet up, and be comfortable.