

home, in the workplace, at church, or in the wider community. How we lead and serve in these places indicates our real answer to Jesus' question, "Do you understand what I have done for you?"

How do we begin to answer Jesus' question? **[PPT #9]** We still live in a pyramid-shaped society that makes it difficult for us to grasp the full implications of his foot washing action. It directly opposes the way we are taught how the world works. Every day our culture bombards us with a message like: "Work your way to the top." "Look out for yourself." "Show them who's boss." "Be in control." It is very hard to take seriously someone who kneels down and washes feet.

If you really do struggle with Jesus' question today, take some time to become quiet. Ask God to be near. **[PPT #10]** Let us open our hearts and minds to understand and actually do as Jesus has done for us. Let us humble ourselves, striving for a downward journey. Jesus calls us to serve others, especially those who are in need rather than to be served by others. The blessing comes from following the foot washing Christ.

Questions for Reflection

1. When has someone washed your feet? What was it like?
2. Do you find it easier to serve or to be served? Why?
3. What would a "downward journey" look like for you?
4. What excites and scares you most about following the servant-pattern of Jesus?

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Questions God Asks Us (6)

Do You Understand What I Have Done For You?

John 13:12-17

Rev. Dr. Charles Yoon

[PPT #1] Today's text is the story of Jesus' foot washing. Many churches try to observe foot washing on Maundy Thursday, but many Christians don't like the ritual. Jesus asked his disciples after washing their feet. "*Do you understand what I have done for you?*" (13:12) Jesus' foot washing action is counter culture in our society, so we tend to shy away from the question's tough challenge. Foot washing seems too challenging and too radical for ordinary people like us.

To understand what Jesus' foot washing may mean for our lives, we must step back into Jesus' first-century world. **[PPT #2]** Jesus' society was arranged like a pyramid. At the top were the powerful, the well-off and the well-educated. They were the ones in charge and the ones who ruled. At the bottom were the powerless, such as the slaves, the uneducated, and the alienated. Their job was to serve those at the top. That was the way things worked. It was never the other way around.

[PPT #3] One of the ways in which those at the bottom served those above was to wash their feet after a journey or when they came to their home. This menial job was reserved for the lowest servants. When they got together for the Passover supper with Jesus, Jesus got up, put the towel around his waist, and began to wash their feet. He was identifying with those at the bottom of the pyramid. Quite literally he had gone on a journey downward, acting as a servant.

[PPT #4] Not surprising, Peter reacted strongly. 'This is not the way things are supposed to work. Our master should not be washing our feet. If we go along with this, I will need to readjust all my attitudes,

my values, my relationships, the whole way I see the world. I don't want to lower myself like this to anyone. I will not let Jesus wash my feet.' When he said this aloud, Jesus' response to Peter was quite firm: *"Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."* (13:8)

Perhaps like Peter we might resist the idea of a downward journey. In our society, we would like to spend time with those like us than to be with those who are different and at the bottom. People at the bottom are suffering people, broken people, and excluded people. It might often be quite scary to be with them. Exposing ourselves to their desperate needs can be unsettling.

[PPT #5] God continues to call us on this journey downward. Each of us needs to work out what this may mean in our particular situation. At the very least, it implies our involvement with people at the bottom of the pyramid. This involvement could mean forming a relationship with someone who is homeless and needy, or who suffers from a mental illness, or who is unemployed, or who has Alzheimer's, or who is severely handicapped, or who is a refugee. It may also mean something more. Can you see how Jesus' question, "Do you understand what I have done for you?" challenges us in our pyramid society and in our comfort zone?

[PPT #6] When Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, he gave us a pattern to follow. He said to his disciples, *"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."* (13:15) If we want to experience the life God gives, we must follow Jesus' example and wash one another's feet.

Biblical scholars often point out that the word 'example' in the New Testament Greek means "pattern." Think of a dressmaker who lays out her pattern over fabrics of various colors and designs. She will cut to fit differing body shapes. But each time, the pattern will determine the shape of the dress. Similarly, Jesus has given us the pattern on which to model our lives. Even though we are all different, this pattern will express itself clearly in each faithful life. It

is the pattern of giving ourselves in loving service, just as Jesus did when he washed the disciples' feet.

[PPT #7] Jesus' foot washing example points us toward a greater challenge than doing small things for others. It is far more challenging to become a servant in heart and mind, to lay down our lives in the service of the servant-king who gave his life on the cross for every human being. Jesus' action is revolutionary. When he knelt at the feet of his disciples, he modeled a new way of being; a completely new attitude toward life; a new way of living and serving our families, our friends, our colleagues, and even our enemies.

When Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, he turned our understanding of the exercise of authority upside down. The popular beliefs today about leadership are that leaders must be strong; they must show that they are in charge, in control; they must not reveal weakness or get too close to those "beneath" them; otherwise familiarity could breed contempt; their influence could be compromised. Not surprising, when leaders of any kind adopt these beliefs, they are often aloof, distant, and inaccessible.

[PPT #8] However, Jesus invites us to exercise leadership and authority in a radically different way. When Jesus washed his disciples' feet, he did not abandon his authority. He did not deny it or pretend not to have any. He accepted the authoritative titles "Lord" and "Master." (13:13) He often amazed people with the authority with which he spoke and acted. Yet, when we meditate on the picture of him kneeling before Peter, we view a different model of the exercise of authority. This authority finds expression in vulnerability, weakness, and service. It can imply closeness, friendship, and intimacy.

But how do we exercise our authority? Do we throw our weight around, or do we lead in a spirit of humility? Do we come across as superior or as persons seeking to serve? These are important concerns, especially if we want to follow Jesus. All of us, to some degree or another, have some form of leadership responsibility: at