

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Jesus] poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded.(John 13:5)

Once upon a time, a frail elderly man came to our church in the wintertime wearing worn out and cracked boots. He had done this more than once. This time though, the weather was bad, with snow, and walking to church meant that that elderly man had to walk through snow and water with those cracked boots. Surely his feet got wet from that, but he never complained. He seemed not even to notice.

But a young man in our congregation noticed and gently saddled up close to the old man and measured his foot size, on the sly, by comparing it to his own. Then the young man went out and bought some new boots for the old man. He waterproofed the boots and broke them in some so that they would be easy to wear. I came into the story at that point because the young man asked me to quietly take the old man aside, give him the new boots, and put them on him.

The old man was delighted by this. It could help remind us what it means to be elderly and frail if I mention that the reason for the old boots might not have been because of lack of money, but simply because when you are old and alone, it is harder to get some things done than when you are young.

But this elderly man didn't have to do anything for these new boots. He did not have to make it to the shoe store. He did not have to sort through the array of choices. He did not have to try them on or waterproof them. He simply received them, and was glad to have them.

As for me, I found it a very moving thing to bend down and help the man take off his old boots and to put on the new ones. The issue was the fragility of it all. You put on your boots and take them off without much thinking about it, I bet. But for a frail elderly person, it can be taxing to bend down and reach the boots. Even the weight of the boots can be a challenge. As I guided his feet into the boots, I was conscious of how delicate the bone

structure of the foot seemed. I unlaced the boots and opened them up wide, and tried to ease the foot into the boot, hoping that there would be enough room. And there was. I laced up the boots and the man went happily on his way.

It dawns on me that in dealing with feet, sometimes the proper attitude is joy and fun, and some other times, the proper attitude is care and gentleness, being mindful of how fragile the feet are.

The first case is illustrated by parents and the feet of their babies. Mother takes the foot in her hand and finds absolute joy in that little foot. She sings, "This little piggie went to market, and this little pig stayed home." She laughs and tickles and kisses the foot.

And the other case is illustrated by the emergency room doctor examining the injured patient, or anyone trying to put boots on an elderly frail man.

In both cases, the one with strength takes care of the other person, with either joy or with care.

Jesus does both. Jesus is the strong One, who holds his strength in reserve and measures it out carefully so that he does not crush the feet of his disciples. And Jesus is the Man of love, who washes the feet of his disciples because he loves them and takes joy in them.

Peter: do not resist such love! Why, this love on display when Jesus washes the feet of the disciples is but the very tip of the iceberg. There is a whole vastness of love behind Jesus bending down and washing the feet of his disciples. Indeed, we are about to witness something of the immensity of that love, for soon the soldiers will come and whisk Jesus away. And he will go willingly, because in that manner, he will exercise that vast love for us, which costs him his life, but which means life for us.

To this loving Jesus be the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.