

April 8, 2009  
Maundy Thursday  
Pr. Craig M. Mueller

### *AN AWKWARD POSITION*

No one wants to be put in an awkward position. Forced to say or do something outside our comfort zone. Or puts us at risk. Or just doesn't feel quite right.

As we begin the Three Days--the Triduum, the liturgies that define and renew our faith--we have to be honest: there are some things that we are going to hear and do, that, are awkward. At the top of the list is probably footwashing. Unless you've heard John 13 enough times, or have been in congregations that do footwashing on Maundy Thursday, the whole thought seems a bit bizarre. On Sunday one of our new members said: "Are you really going to wash feet on Thursday night?" Some congregations go far to have people wash each others' hands, to help remove what we could call the "awkward-factor."

But start with the gospel. The disciples are put in an awkward position. Their master, their rabbi, their leader is doing something shocking, unexpected, downright wrong. He is getting down on his knees. He is assuming the position of a slave and servant, and washing their feet. Blunt Peter, who has no troubling blurring out what he thinks, finds it not only awkward, but unfathomable. "You will never wash my feet," he says.

There are some lessons to learn, and some gifts to receive, that come not from hearing someone talk about them. They are only learned through doing. And it begins with the vulnerable act of receiving. Most people say they'd rather wash someone's feet than have their own feet washed. Our feet are, well, personal space. Often, not our best feature. They receive wear and tear. To allow someone else to touch our feet is ... a bit awkward.

Yet truth is: many of us don't do too well at receiving love. Being accepted. Receiving a compliment. Yet the picture of Jesus washing his disciple's feet is for us as well. At the Vigil of Easter we will gather around the baptismal waters that heal and forgive, restore and renew. This same life-giving water is poured over our feet. A picture of God's never-ending mercy that accepts us, warts and all. That accepts even our awkward attempts to love and serve. This washing of feet is a picture of divine love that enters and becomes part of our messy world.

Our baptism now sends us forth to be in awkward positions. To take unpopular stands for the last and the least. To take sides with those on the outside. To risk misunderstanding from family or friends. To be the face, the hands, the feet of Christ for the world.

But consider a few more positions we will take during the Three Days. Even kneeling puts us in an awkward position, a position of dependence. Coming forward to put out our hands to receive the body and blood of Christ is making an awkward statement, if you think about it: that we are in need. That we don't have it all together. That we can't do it on our own. That we are no better or no worse than anyone else. We all eat from the same loaf and drink from the same cup.

Tomorrow night we will do something even more strangely awkward. We will come forward and give reverence to the ultimate sign of loss, defeat, death. And learn that there is no other path to resurrection.

In all these positions, actions speak louder than words. It's not the time for lofty theology or profound ideas. It's about learning through doing. It's about finding through letting go. It's about taking the journey and being open to wherever it takes us.

So consider taking some risks these next Three Days. Let your body experience anew the mystery of Christ's dying and rising through the rituals we will share together. Let yourself be in some new, even if awkward positions. And why not? Why not consider getting out of your pew tonight and letting someone, even a stranger, pour water on your feet and then dry them with a towel? Maybe you will learn something new about death and resurrection. About grace. About baptism. About a God who is willing to stoop to the lowest position. For us and all the world.