Holy Thursday, Maundy Thursday, and I am thinking of that night so long ago. In my mind I am there with the disciples. I am present with Jesus. You are there, too. Can you see it? The upper room in the draughty edifice, us stumbling in exhausted. We are starving. It’s just before the Passover Feast. So much has happened. So much will happen.

We gather for a simple supper. Even Jesus has a kind of weight-of-the-world weariness about him. He’s talked a lot about going away lately, but he is fully present now, and his love has arms that hold us close. Still, a sadness lingers in his eyes. It reminds me of how the prophet Isaiah describes him, as a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.

The table is set, and we recline where we’re seated, grateful to be with him. Our cups are lined like guards before us, full of wine. A basket of bread lies in the centre of the table. Later he will tell us the wine is his blood poured out, and the bread his body broken. Later. Now we sit. Night, as thick and palpable as fog, surrounds us. The flames on the candles bow and rise in the breezy room, as if they too, worship our Lord.

Then Jesus sets aside his outer garments and dons an apron like a slave would wear. He pours water in a basin. We exchange puzzled looks. “Give me your feet,” he says. We are stunned silent, each of us carefully removing our sandals, unsure of what to say–what to do–faced with such shocking humility. Foot washing is the worst of tasks, despised by a servant’s gesture. Yet Jesus kneels before us, one by one, and washes our feet. I watch Him move from person to person. Dear God, Jesus is on His knees, pouring water on our rough soles. The Son of God, the Son of Man, washes us as if the pitcher contains, then releases, his own tears. The water slips between our toes, and the filth of the world falls to the ground, ground now hallowed by His presence. We couldn’t help but feel emotional. Some of us wailed as he worked. He sure knows how to make a mess of things.

When he gets to me, I choke out his name, “Oh, Jesus,” I cry. Hot salty tears roll from my cheeks and drop onto Jesus’ hand as he reaches up to wipe my face. “Master let me wash yours,” I beg him. He gently, but firmly refuses me. “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will after this,” he says to me.

So, I let him wash me, Jesus, dressed as a slave, as I sit there, amazed. He cleanses us all, every one of us. “Do you understand what I have done to you?” he asks. His brown eyes shine in the candlelight. “You address me as ‘Teacher,’ ‘Master,’ and rightly so. That is what I am. So, if I, the Master and Teacher washed your feet, you must now wash each other’s feet. I’ve laid down a pattern for you. What I’ve done, you do. A servant is not ranked above His master; an employee doesn’t give orders to the employer. If you understand what I’m telling you, act like it—and live a blessed life.”

Jesus makes things so difficult, and then sets them right with such a simple, homely message, but it is good news. When he is done with you, you are washed as white as snow.

As I reflect on that day, I hear His voice, resonate, yet soft, and feel His breath warm on my face, as he leaned into me and asked me, ‘give me your feet.’

I think of this every Maundy Thursday, as we world weary travellers, parched and, hurting, and oh so vulnerable, gather. We are looking for Jesus, needing water, and trusting our souls, and soles of our feet to his servants. Sometimes we sit shoulder to shoulder reclined. Waiting. Humbled. Remembering. And our feet are washed clean, while God’s slave cradles them in the circle of his tear-stained hands.

Let us pray

Loving God, we remember today all who mourn, their hearts broken by tragedy, tears a constant companion, laughter and happiness seeming a distant memory.

Reach out into their pain, heartache and sadness, and give them the knowledge that you understand their pain and share their sorrow.

May your arms enfold them, your love bring comfort, and your light finally scatter the shadows, so that they may know joy once more and celebrate life in all its fulness. Amen