

BAPTISM: PEOPLE IN COVENANT

Session 6

Jesus Washes His Friends' Feet

FOCUS

Jesus had a Last Supper with his friends. The learners should be able to tell what Jesus was teaching when he washed the disciples' feet at this meal.

GETTING READY

This is the first in a series of three sessions in this unit that relate to the themes of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Day.

Holy Week begins with the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. On Thursday, he gathered with his disciples for a Passover supper. In the Gospels of *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke* he instructs his disciples to find a place to prepare the meal. Jesus and his disciples break bread together and Jesus says the words that are similar to those we hear at Eucharist. He tells them that one of them will betray him. The writer of the *Gospel of John* provides a different story of what happened at the Last Supper. He shares a footwashing in *John 13:1-15*.

Footwashing was not uncommon at that time. The roads were dusty, and many wore open sandals. Washing a guest's feet would be a kind gesture that would also limit dirt being brought inside. The disciples might have expected a servant to wash their feet. They were dismayed that Jesus would take on the role of a servant to wash their feet.

Today churches often schedule a footwashing on Maundy Thursday as part of Holy Week observances. Footwashing is a reminder that we are to follow Christ's example of servanthood.

What Jesus says about “washing” would probably have been linked by early Christians to their baptisms. Jesus says to Peter that, even though he does not understand it yet, he must allow Jesus to wash him in order that he may be truly united to his Teacher and Lord. In our baptism, we are both cleansed of sin and made one with Christ.

For primary-age children, already concerned about status and position, the story can have an important impact. Jesus' lesson on humble service to others—exemplified in this sign he performs at the Last Supper—is a powerful reminder to us that the life of a people baptized into Christ's Body is meant for serving others.

The word “Maundy” is an old English word formed from the Latin *mandatum* (as in the word “commandment”). On Maundy Thursday we remember Jesus' words from *John 15:2*, spoken that night after the Supper: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

Almighty God, you gave to your servant special gifts of grace to understand and teach the truth as it is in Christ Jesus: Grant that by this teaching we may know you, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

TEACHING TIP

In forming questions for learners, begin with fact questions that get the learners in touch with the story. Let the next level of questions ask for comparisons regarding events or lives of people in the story. The last level of questioning can focus on how an individual feels, or would respond to an event or circumstance. Children will be more comfortable discussing their feelings after they have had time to think about the content of stories.

GATHERING

Ahead of time, clip out magazine or newspaper pictures of persons engaged in forms of service to others (such as waiters, bank tellers, computer instructors, or salespersons in stores). As learners arrive, ask: What do the pictures seem to have in common? What are the people doing? What heading could be written to connect the pictures together? (Be alert for any responses that suggest “service” and “serving.”)

When all are present, gather the group and say the Apostles' Creed (using Poster No. 11 in the Teacher's Packet):

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth. . . .

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 96

STORYTELLING *(Time: 10 minutes)*

Tell the story of Jesus' washing the disciples' feet at the Last Supper. Open the Bible and show the learners where *John 13:1-15* is located. Read aloud verse 14:

“So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.”

Finish with the words: The word of the Lord.

The learners respond: Thanks be to God.

1. Begin by describing sandals worn in Jesus' day, and the common practice of having a servant wash away dust from the feet of guests arriving for a meal.

2. Describe the scene as Jesus and his disciples gathered for the supper that would be his last before he was betrayed and led away to be tried and crucified. The Twelve might expect that a servant would wash their feet.

3. But Jesus did a very surprising thing! He put a towel around his waist, took up a basin of water, and did the footwashing himself.

4. Reveal Peter's surprise and protest, and share Jesus' reply to him.

5. Explain that Jesus wanted to make it very clear that he had come to be God's special Servant. He wants us all to learn to be servants to one another. That is the way we let the world know that we are a baptized community

who cares about the people around us, and will be helpful to them. We do not act proud and boastful, expecting simply to be served by others.

(The learners' book, *God's People Are Baptized*, chapter 6, describes the relationship of baptism to the season of Lent. Remind the children that they can read this story at home.)

CREATING (Time: 15-20 minutes)

Option 1. Towels

Provide each child with a piece of cloth or inexpensive dish towel. Use flat cotton or linen cloth; avoid fabric that pills easily. Using fabric markers or other permanent markers, invite the learners to decorate the towels with symbols such as a cross, fish, Greek letters, or other Christian symbols. (Display some possibilities from books or articles about Church symbolism.) The towels will serve as reminders of Jesus' servanthood, demonstrated by the footwashing account in the *Gospel of John*.

Option 2. The Last Supper

Examine one or more pictures of the Last Supper. (Note that a reproduction of the well-known painting by Leonardo daVinci can be found in the optional learners' book for the Shell Primary year—*Jesus, Son of God*.) Invite the class members to create their own versions of the Last Supper. Give each learner a piece of construction paper, markers, and other art materials. Some may wish to draw; others may want to create a collage effect by adding tissue and other materials.

EXPLORING THE STORY (Time: 10-15 minutes)

Option 1. Spinner Game, “What Happened?”

Use the game board provided on Poster No. 15 in the Teacher's Packet. Paste the sheet to a piece of heavy cardboard. Use a long-shank paper fastener to attach the spinner through a hole at the center.

Players take turns spinning. The spinner will point to a picture of one of the following: towel, basin, sandals, foot, stairway to the Upper Room, a feast table, a cup, or a loaf of bread. As the spinner stops, the teacher says: “Tell how this picture fits into the story of the Last Supper.”

Option 2. Puzzle, “Jesus Washes His Friends Feet”

Use Puzzle Sheet III.6 titled “Jesus Washes His Friends' Feet.” Make copies for everyone in the class. Directions are given on the sheet.

This can be a class or small group activity, or learners may work independently.

Option 3. Searching the Scripture

The account of the footwashing appears only in the *Gospel of John*. Help learners to find *John 13:1-15*. Provide a series of quoted phrases or clauses from the passage. Ask the class members to locate and call out the verse numbers.

Possible quotations: “before the festival of the Passover” (verse 1); “tied a towel around himself” (verse 4); “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” (verse 6); “you also ought to wash one another's feet” (verse 14). (Add other quoted phrases of your own choosing.)

TALKING IT OVER *(Time: 10-15 minutes)*

Talk with the learners about the role of servants. How was Jesus a servant in the story of Maundy Thursday? Ask: What did the disciples think about what Jesus was doing? What would you have said or done if you had been there? How can/do we serve other people? What are some of the ways God calls us to serve others?

Spend some time reflecting aloud about the needs of hungry and homeless people in your community and in other parts of the world. Encourage the learners to think about forms of service that may be open to members of your congregation.

INQUIRING *(Time: 10-20 minutes)*

Invite a clergyperson to come to the class in vestments for a footwashing. Ask the visitor to speak about this centuries-old practice in the Church.

While respecting the serious nature of this event, be ready for some levity for primary-age children. Footwashing can a fun and community building experience as well. For example, let the children make footprints in paint on large pieces of butcher paper. Then have a footwashing. Encourage a spirit that helps the learners sense the theme of service. Be sure to think through details such as a proper container for the water and sufficient towels.

IMAGINING *(Time: 10-20 minutes)*

Share a story starter: “Jesus welcomed the disciples to the Last Supper. He had a towel in his hand. When Jesus knelt at my feet, I . . .” Invite the learners to use their imaginations and discuss how the story could continue. What would it be like to have Jesus wash your feet?

Individual response. The children can write their own endings or draw pictures. Encourage the learners to express their own thoughts. Avoid giving the impression that there is a “right” way to finish the story.

Group role play. Invite the learners to dress in biblical costumes (from the prop box). Individuals or small groups can choose to participate in one or more of the following scenes: the footwashing, the Last Supper, or other events that exemplify servanthood.

MUSIC *(Time: 10-15 minutes)*

Sing with the *Children Sing!* tape “As Christ breaks bread” (stanza 3 of “I come with joy to meet my Lord” (*The Hymnal 1982*, 304, *We Sing of God*, 51). This hymn for Holy Eucharist is set to an American folk tune and is especially appropriate for this session on the Last Supper. Repeat the stanza several times.

CONTINUING ACTIVITY *(Time: 10-20 minutes)*

Easter Garden. Begin an Easter garden. Use a tray or flat surface to

display several pots in which seeds or small plants can be placed. Work with the learners as they do the planting and watering. Pansies work well for this kind of project. Be sure to include some grass seed, which will sprout quickly and provide a carpet of green for the garden.

TAKE-HOME CARD

Card 24 has a picture of a bowl and a towel, a Scripture verse, facts about the story, and a question to think about. Remind learners to add this card to their collection at home.

CLOSING

We thank you, Lord, for all the blessings of this life.

We thank you for all people who serve others.

(Add other intercessions)

We will exalt you, O God our King;

And praise your Name for ever and ever. Amen.

From The Prayers of the People, Form VI

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 393

All stand and say:

Teacher: Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Learners: Thanks be to God.

TEACHER'S REFLECTION

Primary-age children can be concerned about the welfare of other people. How do the class members demonstrate their awareness of others' needs, and ways in which people of all ages serve one another?

LOOKING AHEAD

The next session is about Good Friday. Read one or more of the Gospel accounts. Recall when you first became aware of what happened on Good Friday. How old were you? What were your reactions? How has your understanding of the Crucifixion changed?