

For the last few months of her life – my grandmother was in a nursing home. And at the very end of her life, she was in a hospital.

My grandmother was in these places because she could not take care of herself. She needed help getting in and out of bed – she needed help moving around – and she needed help feeding herself.

One of the last times I saw my grandmother was in the hospital. During our visit, she needed to use the bathroom ---- and she asked me to help her --- and I have to admit I was a bit embarrassed by that request.

So I told her – I would much rather she ring for a nurse.

And then my grandmother hit me in the heart with a 2 x 4. . . . She said – do you know how degrading it is – to have to ask a complete stranger to help you do such private things?? I know that’s what they get paid to do – but your family – can’t you just help me???

So after recovering from that – I proceeded to try forget how it was making ME FEEL—and concentrated on how it made HER FEEL. . .

Mercy – is a choice. It’s the choice of letting one’s own heart be touched by the pain and suffering of another.

Mercy is not a passive sentiment – it is neither pity nor a feeling of superiority.

Mercy is a connection of one heart to another.

Mercy is what happens when we stand in another person’s shoes – and feel their pain.

That day, in that hospital room, with that request – my grandmother taught me a profound lesson in mercy. . .

I have always thought that my feelings and reaction to my grandmother’s request --- must have been something like Peter’s feeling and reaction – to Jesus’ request. . . Peter said to Jesus: “you will never wash my feet” – implying “that’s what we have servants for!”

And I suppose Jesus wondered how you could leave such an intimate matter up to the hired help. . . instead of letting someone you love do it for you. . . instead of allowing someone you love ---to show you mercy.

How can you say, Peter, that you are willing to suffer and die for me – to lay down your life in following after me ----- if you cannot even entrust your feet to me?

How can you let your feelings of awkwardness or embarrassment or discomfort – get in the way of my gesture of mercy?

Trust me Peter – for mercy overcomes all fear – even the fear of awkwardness and embarrassment . . . For unless you trust me enough to wash you – you will have no inheritance with me. . .

Jesus asks all of us to put ourselves in His place. To move beyond our embarrassment – to move beyond our fear – to move beyond our discomfort – to move beyond how it makes US FEEL --- and to concentrate on how it makes someone else feel.

That’s what mercy, and love, and community, and commitment – is all about --- that’s really the only way true service works. When we forget about ourselves – and concentrate on the other. That’s what Jesus is asking of us.

And so I invite those of you who wish – to move beyond embarrassment –  
To move beyond awkwardness –  
To move beyond how having your feet washed makes YOU feel ---  
And allow someone to be your servant in a gesture of love and respect, of mercy and  
compassion. . .

So come to a footwashing station and take an available seat.  
And then it is your choice as to whether you want one foot washed – or two: so  
take off your shoes and socks.  
Have your feet washed by another person – then stay and wash the feet of the  
person who comes after you.

Mercy is not a passive sentiment – it is neither pity nor a feeling of superiority – it  
is a connection of one heart to another.  
So let's connect some hearts tonight. . .