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Grace, River Forest
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The Freedom of Being Served

“Tell me more about that...” would be the invitation.

We do not often lead with our struggles. We don't give a lot of attention to being vulnerable. As I was discerning my call to ministry, the formation process put me in situations where I was encouraged to talk about my shadow sides. The parts of me that I wrestle with. My failures. My growing edges. We were encouraged to share with others the pain we have experienced and how it still affects us. I remember the visceral reaction I had to that phrase at first- “tell me more.” “No!” My internal monologue would shout. Others might find out I don't have it all together. Displaying competence and projecting confidence are easier and they get you further. Others might find out I need help- and I am supposed to be one of the helpers.

Maybe you have heard the name Bryan Johnson. He is a self-described anti-aging expert. He aims to make death optional.

“Johnson, 46, is a centimillionaire tech entrepreneur who has spent most of the last three years in pursuit of a singular goal: don't die. During that time, he's spent more than \$4 million developing a life-extension system called Blueprint, in which he outsources every decision involving his body to a team of doctors, who use data to develop a strict health regimen to reduce what Johnson calls his “biological age.” “Most people assume death is inevitable. We're just basically trying to prolong the time we have before we die.” He adds, “I don't think there's been any time in history where Homosapiens could say with a straight face that death may not be inevitable.”

There is also the rapidly accelerating technology of AI. Some people are using artificial intelligence chatbots to create avatars of departed loved ones. Are they really dead?

We might not go to such extremes or expense to keep death or even the signs of age at a safe distance or deny its inevitability, but as one article explains “The funeral as we know it is becoming a relic.” Less and less people are opting for traditional funerals and even less are occurring with the body present. Looking death in the face is getting harder to do. We even internally protest those invitations to die every day as baptized children of God. To loosen our grip. Let go. Put down our guard. Stop pretending or performing. Lay aside our convictions or agendas or ego. Fail every once in a while. Embrace weakness. Live honestly before God and

our neighbors. We protest, even as we know where these three days are headed. That his hour had come.

(start to move)

Every place Christ calls us, he is already there waiting with arms outstretched. He has spent his whole ministry turning things upside down. The role reversal that we witness tonight is simply an extension of that.

(move to the floor)

They were shocked.

On the night before he died; (death it seems is inevitable after all at least for the Divine) the eternal word made flesh, the God of all creation, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, took his disciples' feet into them. He washed their feet.

We might protest like Peter. It almost sounds ridiculous. This is no job for God! We serve God. We are good at it. We wash our savior's feet. We are competent and confident. We have answers. We are accomplished. This should be the other way around. The reversal persists.

(kneel)

This is not the way of Christ. This God refuses to stay at any distance or keep you at arm's length. For he is your servant savior. The one that lowers himself. Empties himself. Pours himself out. Gives himself for you. Comes all the way down- to your graves and the hells of your life. When everyone else is gone. To every end. His love persists.

Christ takes all of you into his hands. We are born from his wounded side. Washed. Forgiven. Made clean. We are still served tonight by Christ. As he comes even closer. This God- never far away any longer. The God who wrapped his hands around his disciples feet now places his own body and blood in yours. How close- closer still.

Christ always comes to make us free. Connected to the servant we are invited into this reversal. What is foolish to the world is the wisdom of God. As the body of Christ it only makes sense to embrace the things the world shuns and hides but only keeps us enslaved. We welcome those little deaths, weakness, our wounds, failure, and vulnerability. For this Christ is always working one more surprise.

If we were to say to Jesus “tell me more” he might say “I give you a new commandment, that

you love one another. Just as I have loved you.” This includes washing feet. Drawing close to Christ disguised as our neighbor. For us though, the scandal is that we are invited to have our feet washed still. We protest, many of us are the helpers. We know what to do. We have answers. We are Christ to others. Christ says, come. Enter into the reversal. Receive Christ as gift hidden in bread, wine, word, and stranger. Adore him here and there too. Be loved. Be washed. Be served. Be free. He’s near. For you.