

“What I am doing you don't realise now, but afterward you will understand” John chapter 13 verse 7

Have you ever been in a position where there are things happening in your life or in the world around you that are so far removed from your previous experience, or so different from your expectations that you feel you have no frame of reference to help you understand what is going on? I imagine most people have been there at some time or another in their lives, and if they haven't, then the chances are that they will be at some point.

Peter finds himself there as, during a meal with Jesus and the other disciples, Jesus gets up from his place at the head of the table and starts washing the feet of the disciples. Peter watches in astonishment and disbelief and, when Jesus reaches him, he asks, incredulously, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” The juxtaposition of the title “Lord” and the question “are you going to wash my feet?” would have been a complete contradiction in terms at that time. The last thing a master would do would be to wash someone's feet. That was a job for the lowest servant.

But Jesus understands that Peter has no cultural context in which to make sense of what he is doing. He doesn't waste time trying to explain something to Peter that would invalidate everything that Peter had ever learned about social hierarchy. He knows that Peter does not understand it now, but assures him that he will in the future. That's too much for Peter. “You will never wash my feet!” he exclaims. “If I don't wash you, you have no part with me,” Jesus replies.

The fact that this incident is reported in the gospel of John reveals to us that his disciples did come to understand why Jesus did this. He did it to show that he had come to serve them by leaving his heavenly glory and taking human form. His death and resurrection would enable all who accepted him to be cleansed from their sins.

To understand this is a spiritual exercise of faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God. When things happen in our lives that we do not understand, faith tells us that God has a reason for it that is at present inaccessible to our human reason and perception, but that God has a purpose in it that will be revealed in due time, and that it is intended for our best good and for his glory in our lives. We may not understand or enjoy everything that happens to us in this world, but the knowledge that God knows what it is intended to achieve in our lives can bring us considerable comfort and encouragement.

Prayer

Father, I can't pretend to be able to understand you or everything you do, but I thank you that you reveal to me all that I need to know in order to live a life that glorifies you. Thank you that you are revealed in Jesus, and that through faith in him I can know your assurance of your care, protection and guidance in my life. Be glorified in me, Lord. In Jesus name, amen.

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