



## From the Pulpit: August 18, 2024

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Reverend Dr. Katie Snipes Lancaster

John13:12–15

### Poetry Church—The Path to Kindness, III: About Standing (in Kinship)

Today’s scripture comes from the gospel of John. Jesus is saying goodbye. He knows what he faces. He knows there is no way to escape his fate. The machine that is the Roman empire is searching for him. His message of love and care was too radical to behold. He faces death. And now he says goodbye.

Like a poet, Jesus packs as many metaphors into his last meal with his disciples as possible, he washes their feet. And he tells them “go and do likewise.” And he leaves them to figure out what that might look like in the days and years and centuries that follow. The gospel of John:

*After Jesus had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had reclined again, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.*

#### About Standing (in Kinship)

By [Kimberly Blaeser](#)

We all have the same little bones in our foot twenty-six with funny names like *navicular*. Together they build something strong—our foot arch a pyramid holding us up. The bones don’t get casts when they break. We tape them—one *phalange* to its neighbor for support.

(Other things like sorrow work that way, too—find healing in the leaning, the closeness.)

Our feet have one quarter of all the bones in our body.

Maybe we should give more honor to feet and to all those tiny but blessed cogs in the world—communities, the forgotten architecture of friendship.

“Healing comes only in the leaning, the closeness.”

Kimberly Blaeser says “poetry is an act of attention.” she says “poetry is an act of attention, a way that we ask ourselves and the readers to look and look more deeply at what is around us.” She says “Only if we come to know those wonderful and mysterious realities and love them will we be moved to protect them.”<sup>1</sup>

And so she draws your attention. She writes “About Standing (in Kinship).” She notices. She takes on these twenty-six little bones. She looks and looks again. Your foot. Her foot. His foot. The foot of your neighbor. The small bones that “don’t get casts when they break” that are instead taped together, taped together “to its neighbor for support.”

She notices. And then she pushes us deeper. What else is like this, she asks without asking. What else is like this? Yes sorrow works this way too. Healing comes only in the leaning, the closeness. There is no cast. There is no isolation. Sorrow works this way too, healing only comes through leaning, closeness, widow greeting widow, every casserole or invitation to dinner another way to lean in, to draw near. Maybe this is the “forgotten architecture of friendship.”

<sup>1</sup>“Gordon Henry, LeAnne Howe, Margaret Noodin, and Kimberly Blaeser about Indigenous poetry,” *Prerequisites: MSU English*, podcast audio, March 25, 2021, accessed August 20, 2024

Kimberly Blaeser is an enrolled member of the White Earth Nation. That means she grew up in Northwestern Minnesota and is part of the wider community of the Anishinaabe, a wider Indigenous community of people across the Great Lakes. She grew up harvesting from the land, “fish, berries, birch bark, black ash, sweet grass, maple sap, and wild rice.” Her first experience with water was far from faucet, where she and her family “collected rain, and pumped drinking water from the belly of the earth, and carried it from springs.” In this way no one wasted water. Water she says, was “a relative... sacred.”<sup>2</sup> This too is the “forgotten architecture of friendship.”

Blaeser says we can’t “own, possess, or barter, the relationship we have with the natural world.” Which is why she is passionate about protecting her native land from the threat of a possible copper mine which—if you’ve been following this story in the news—would leech sulfuric acid and heavy metals into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and the surrounding watershed which was Blaeser’s childhood home. We cannot “own, possess, or barter the relationship we have with the natural world.”

And so we hear her poem with fresh ears. “Maybe we should give more honor to feet” she says. If you have ever known a broken toe or blister, you know. She walked the earth, pail of water after pail of water from stream to supper, from tributary to table, and she knows with a kind of intimacy what it means to honor the feet that carry you from one place to another. She understands with a kind of intimacy what it means to see and acknowledge “all those tiny but blessed cogs in the world,” each drop of water, a brother, a sister, a friend.

Maybe it is same with you. Especially with any of you who have walked her ancestral land. I have to guess that at least one person here has walked the rivers and

lakes of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. Maybe even this summer. Buoyed by a bunch of Boy Scouts, accompanied or accompanying a troop to those sacred and ancient trails. You know. To carry a canoe. To bear the burden of every meal carried in a pack on your back. To fetch water up the shore. You must “give more honor to feet.” You must acknowledge “all those tiny but blessed cogs in the world.”

Amy Frykholm writes, “knobs, calluses, bunions, corns, misshapen toes, warts. Most of us keep our feet covered at all times. To have our feet exposed, washed, even touched... is an act of great vulnerability.”<sup>3</sup>

*“Stoop. Bend low. find healing in the leaning, the closeness.”*

One summer in the Boundary Waters as an adult leader with my youth group, I fell ill with a fever and spent half a day in the tent. It had been wet and rainy and the temperatures were dipping into the 40s, even in late July. I couldn’t

shake the chill and one of the teenage boys I was traveling with handed me his last pair of dry wool socks to wear. “An act of great vulnerability.” Even this, receiving a pair of dry socks felt like “the forgotten architecture of friendship,” a gift.

And then across the chasm of centuries, there is Jesus. Stooing to wash his disciples feet. His great gift... his own labor of love under the “forgotten architecture of friendship...” wherein he discloses what it means to follow him. Like this. Stoop. Bend low. “find healing in the leaning, the closeness.”

<sup>2</sup>“As She Rises.” “The Inland See.” Podcast audio, October 11, 2021. Accessed August 20, 2024.

<sup>3</sup>Frykholm, Amy. “The Strange, Humbling Ritual of Foot Washing.” *The Christian Century*, March 25, 2020.

One scholar puts it this way “It’s always easier to follow Jesus in our heads than it is to follow him with our feet on the Via Dolorosa.”<sup>4</sup> The Via Dolorosa, the way of sorrow. The Via Dolorosa, sacrifice. The Via Dolorosa, the servant’s path. And Jesus replies to his disciples, “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done to you.”

This is the “forgotten architecture of friendship.”

This is how to follow Jesus on the Via Dolorosa. Like this. Stoop. Bend low. “find healing in the leaning, the closeness.”

I want to read one final poem before we close. Poet Michael Escoubas brings the story of Jesus’ foot washing to our own midwestern garden, imagining the garden itself as the one washing your feet, placing Jesus within the whole of creation, a Cosmic Christ who bends low to meet us in the simplicity of the sun-washed places we hold dear.

It is called “Towel and Basin” and begins with a quote from Emily Dickenson which urges us to see the heavenly realm in our everyday reality, which pushes us to see the divine landscape that surrounds us everywhere and always. Emily Dickenson says,

*Instead of going to heaven at last,  
I’m going all along.*—Emily Dickinson

And Michael Escoubas’ poem continues as he has us step out on his front porch with him, to water his hanging plants as any of us might, and take care to honor and hold the green and growing earth. It seems right for a warm August morning. He writes:

This morning I plodded in pajamas  
and bare toes toting my full water pitcher,  
prepared as an offering for my  
hanging blue Fan plant. The tall  
grass washed my feet as Jesus might.

I was met by a congregation  
of glad-handed Hostas greeting  
and touching me, choirs of Clematis  
robed in purple, jovial Jonquils clad in yellow,  
sun-facing Spiderworts, and sweet green Mint  
mingled with spicy Oregano, breathing  
their fragrances, glistening and glowing  
in sunlight and dew.

“This is the  
‘forgotten  
architecture of  
friendship.’”

They danced when they saw me;  
asked no questions, made no judgments,  
anointed me with dew, toweled my dusty  
feet with warm sun, then sent me on  
to do for another what they had done  
for me.<sup>5</sup>

“Towel and Basin” by Michael Escoubas.

Jesus tells us “you also should do as I have done to you,” and so for us this means tending to “the forgotten architecture of friendship,” bending low, “find healing in the leaning, the closeness.” Let us close with a final reading of Kimberly Blaeser’s poem

### About Standing (in Kinship)

By [Kimberly Blaeser](#)

We all have the same little bones in our foot  
twenty-six with funny names like *navicular*.  
Together they build something strong—  
our foot arch a pyramid holding us up.  
The bones don’t get casts when they break.  
We tape them—one *phalange* to its neighbor for support.  
(Other things like sorrow work that way, too—  
find healing in the leaning, the closeness.)  
Our feet have one quarter of all the bones in our body.  
Maybe we should give more honor to feet  
and to all those tiny but blessed cogs in the world—  
communities, the forgotten architecture of friendship.

<sup>4</sup>Herhold, Robert H. “Foot Washing and Last Things (John 13:1-20).” *The Christian Century*, March 9, 1983, 205.

<sup>5</sup>Michael Escoubas, “Towel and Basin,” *Illinois State Poetry Society Newsletter*, 2014, Issue 6.

**—Prayers of the People—**  
**The Reverend Christine V. Hides**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
Who knows our hearts,  
Our calloused places,  
And worn out joints,  
Christ, who loves us through our frayed nerves,  
Outrageous outbursts,  
And invisible tears.  
Lord, who calls us back from our denial,  
To follow you, and to serve one  
another in love and in humility.

Hear our deepest prayers and the cries of the world.  
Have mercy on those who are pressed down by forces  
beyond their control.  
Bring liberation and abundant life.  
Tend to the aches and injuries of those whose  
bodies are doing what bodies do  
despite the miracles of modern medicine.  
Heal the joints and muscles,  
strengthen our immunity, point to the right  
treatment.  
Let every heart beat with quality of life.  
Let gentleness rest on those in their last days.

Hover near the chaos and anxiety of this world when  
every news cycle  
offers a new worry.  
Give us wisdom and compassion,  
for the intractable challenges we face in a warming  
world,  
where many are forced to move but have nowhere  
to go.

We pray without ceasing for peace in every corner of  
this great big globe;  
where our lives are intertwined with the lives of  
billions of others.  
Be especially near our own city as the convention  
begins tomorrow.  
Let there be space for different voices and  
perspectives.  
Most of all, let there be peace.

[Lord, grants us what one poet calls “a great wild  
goodness”  
that fills us with a kindness for everything.  
The big spider that made its way to the corner  
behind the couch,  
the dog who waits for their long walk,  
the neighbor whose car alarm went off again,  
and the one who forgot to take out the trash again.

Let us hear when the wild goodness shouts “too  
tame, too tame!”  
And respond by going outside to read poems with  
the stars,  
returning inside to eat bread in the kitchen with  
our loves,  
our gratitude making us unafraid to be happy,]\*

For it’s Jesus Christ, who knelt at his disciples feet,  
who is the source of wild goodness  
in a world that waits for your kingdom to come.  
Our Father.... Amen.

*\*The bracketed portion of this prayer is based on the poem, “A Great  
Wild Goodness” by Annie Lighthart*

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