

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but perhaps later you will understand."

"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well."

(John 13:1-4, NIV)

# The Washing

*By Kent A. Hansen*

**D**r. Smith was a controversial physician in my town. There was a time, years ago, when he refused to take measures to allow his terminally ill patients to breathe on artificial respiration or resuscitate them in cardiac arrest. He didn't follow the policies of the local hospital when he did this. He knew the policies and he disagreed with them. The policies required tests, procedures, and medical opinions that took time and money. Dr. Smith thought that this prolonged the agony of his patients and their families, so he made his own decisions and carried them out without regard for the policies.

The hospital's medical staff objected. There was an investigation and charges against Dr. Smith. If the charges were found to be true, he would be dismissed from the medical staff.

He was a smart, experienced physician. The physicians challenging him were intelligent and well intentioned. As is true of most organizational conflicts, the issue was over authority. The divisions were deep and the conflict severe.

The medical staff held hearings and voted to dismiss Dr. Smith. He appealed to the hospital board and lost. Newspapers promoted the story because the life-and-death issues were sensational. The controversy was discussed throughout the community.

Dr. Smith sued the hospital to keep his privileges to admit and treat his patients there. The hospital hired



me to defend its interests.

At trial, I began my opening statement by clarifying the issues in harsh terms: "Your honor, Dr. Smith wants to quibble about the hearing procedures. I am here to talk about him killing people."

The court ruled against Dr. Smith. He was dismissed from the medical staff and the staff of another nearby hospital. His practice was limited to the patients he saw in his office and a local nursing home. The dispute was an angry, humiliating episode, disturbing to all concerned.

Years passed. I experienced spiritual renewal in Christ and joined the same congregation that Dr. Smith attended. Each week, I saw him in the back pew with his wife.

I became the local head elder. From time to time, the pastor and I discussed reconciliation with Dr. Smith. The pastor had served on the hospital board at the time of the dismissal. The physicians who led the medical staff investigation also attended the church. None of us talked to Dr. Smith because we feared rejection.

Then came a communion Sabbath. This meant foot washing, what the Adventist Church calls, "the ordinance of humility." Foot washing is the great divide of the Adventist communion service. Many members get up and leave at this point of the service, unwilling to join in what they think is an awkward and meaningless ritual. And so it was with me. I hadn't participated in foot washing in years.

On this particular Sabbath, my wife was occupied with our little son, so I thought, "Well, I'll go wash feet. After all, I'm head elder." I walked down the hall to the room where the men were gathered to wash each others' feet. I saw Dr. Smith standing in the doorway as I approached. Through the entire lawsuit and the years that followed, he and I had never spoken one direct word to each other. Now there was no way to pass without speaking to him.

I said, "Good morning, Doc."

"Do you have anyone to serve you?" he asked me. "No."

He motioned me to sit down. He got a basin of water. I sat down and removed my shoes and socks. He knelt down before me, washed my feet, and dried them. When he was through, I obtained fresh water and knelt down and washed his feet.

It was a moment in which I experienced true reverence. Emotions swept through me of awe and humility, brokenness and tenderness, and thankfulness for a God who could break down the walls and create love between me and this man.

After I dried his feet, I sat down beside Dr. Smith. I told him, "This is amazing considering everything that has happened between us."

"Well," he said, "I've watched you and I've seen how Christ has changed your life."

I replied, "It's blessed me that you're here worshipping week after week after all that you've gone through."

He patted my arm. "I made mistakes and there have been misunderstandings, but the same Jesus who changed you has sustained me these past five years."

Then I said, "I'm sorry for all the pain this has caused you and your family."

We hugged. We remained friends and prayed for each other to the day he died. At his funeral, I stood and said "This man taught me about the power of forgiveness."

What is possible with God? A physician and a lawyer, the professional equivalent of "cats and dogs;" the prosecutor and the prosecuted; a man whose livelihood was attacked and the attacker; washed each other's feet and embraced. If I am ever asked if I've seen a miracle I will tell about this. Such a thing is possible, but only in Christ. If ever I am asked whether I have seen a miracle I will tell this story.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you should also wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." (John 13:12-17, NIV)

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**Kent A. Hansen is a business lawyer and managing attorney of Clayson, Mann, Yaeger, and Hansen in Corona, California. His avocations are reading and writing on topics of prayer and spiritual renewal. [khansen@claysonlaw.com](mailto:khansen@claysonlaw.com).**

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