

There are some things that have changed history. Things like the automobile have changed where we live, how we shop, what we do on vacations. The transistor has brought us everything from portable radios to personal computers. Going back in time there is the light bulb. Can you even imagine living without instant, on demand, light?

Many things have changed history, have created pivotal points in how we live. One is the button; yes, the common, simple thing we call a button. Back before Velcro, snaps and zippers there was the button. Buttons, used as fasteners rather than mere decoration, seem to have been invented in 13th century Germany. There was a long period in which only the wealthy, the royalty, could afford clothes with buttons and their essential partner, button holes.

Convenient, yes; change history, life as we know it, I can tell you are dubious. Yet, before buttons, the commoners were sewn into their winter undergarments, not to emerge until spring. That was the only way to keep clothes on their body without buttons.

Now, if you were one of the masses who had been wearing the same clothes all winter, you probably didn't think much about this - it was the way things were. Yet, imagine if you could travel back in time; tonight you are here and an instant later you are at a 1607 mass standing next to William Shakespeare. What is the first thing that you would notice? True, you would have to walk from wherever the time machine deposited you to the church. The priest would have to have a strong voice to be heard

without sound systems. True, the only light comes from flickering candles. But I think the first thing you would have noticed is the stench; the odor of unwashed bodies around you, overpowering in the confines of the church. These people need a bath, not when spring comes but now!

The button has changed our concept of personal hygiene; it has made us healthier as well as cleaner and better smelling.

Another pivotal point in history, in how we live, is related to buttons even though it significantly predates them. There wasn't anything new about this pivot point - a basin holding some water and a piece of cloth. People, especially the Jews, were particular about washing, washing before meals, washing as part of ritualistic cleaning, washing even as an act of worship.

But this particular washing was pivotal. At that Passover meal, the guest of honor, Jesus, took a basin of water and started to wash the feet of the disciples. Jesus, the Son of God, performing the ritual of the lowliest common slave.

Before clean sidewalks, enclosed shoes and socks, feet got very, very dirty. You walked in the same streets as the camels, as the household waste, in whatever dust and mud the season brought with it. Feet were by far the dirtiest part of the body.

The disciples had been with Jesus for three years. They thought that they knew him, knew what to expect from him. Yet, they were continuously surprised. Surprised at what he said, at what he did.

This night, Jesus started to wash their feet. In surprise, Peter blurted out “Never shall you wash my feet!” And the reply was: “If I do not wash you, you have no part in me.” Immediately, the disciple knew just how dirty he was; how his entire body, his entire being, exterior and interior, needed to be washed clean by God.

Jesus, in washing their feet, shows us a new aspect of a servant leader, a new form of God's love. Jesus, in washing feet, let us know just how much we need to be cleansed by a loving God. The death and resurrection of Jesus cleans us inside out. Jesus seldom even seemed to notice our exteriors; Jesus noticed, cared about, taught about a clean and loving heart. The foot washing calls attention to our need to be clean, the simple meal we celebrate tonight calls attention to how clean we are inside.

We have a part in how clean our hearts are. Knowing Jesus, the teachings of Jesus, sets the standard for us. It is an impossible standard - we do and will fall short for the standard is perfection, perfect love, perfect obedience, perfect cleanliness without a spot of sin. Knowing Jesus leads us to confession, an admittance that we are imperfect; imperfection caused by what we do, what we fail to do. Knowing Jesus offers us the opportunity for spiritual health and hygiene, the opportunity to be clean from all that dirties our soul before God. For in this meal, we celebrate the victory of God over all that separates us from God: death and sin included. We also celebrate the new covenant, the forgiveness of our sins and new life, with a clean heart, in Jesus. Jesus offers all of God's people the opportunity to be washed.

What the button did for our physical cleanliness and hygiene, Jesus offers for our soul. Just because of the growing availability of buttons, people did not automatically start washing more often, but they could. Just because of the availability of the cleansing of Jesus, people do not automatically become clean, but they could.

Let us take a moment as we invite Jesus to wash our feet, to wash our souls, to make us clean before God.