

Good morning. This is a morning in which the congregation gathers to celebrate the significant feat of graduating from high school. You've completed the accomplishment of getting through 2,340 scheduled days of school over the past 13 years. Who knows how many tests, projects, papers, readings, assignments, labs and other activities that you've completed? That is a quite a feat.

And so we're going to talk about your feet this morning. Not that feat. These feet.

One of the songs that we sing here at church comes from Isaiah 52:7, where it says, "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, and who say in Zion, "Our God reigns!"

Think about that. How lovely are the feet...

I don't know about you, but I'm not sure when the last time is that I heard someone's feet described as "lovely." When we find someone attractive, we might say that they have nice eyes, or a nice smile. We might be attracted to other body parts, but the feet? Not so much. I ran cross country and track for six years. I coached for 10 years. I've run seven marathons. I've paid a lot of attention to feet over the years, but I'm not sure that I've seen many that are lovely. In fact, between blisters, and corns, and callouses, they are often something we think of as relatively unattractive, unlovely!

When I was a kid, I liked to run around barefoot. And at the end of the day, Mom would always remind me to wash my feet. That is good practice when you grow up on a dairy farm! This morning, your feet are probably relatively clean, but I'd actually like to think about your dirty feet, and there's three pieces of advice that I'd like to give you about your dirty feet.

The first is to *remember your dirty feet*. Now not all of you have been baptized, and some of you were baptized in another place. But all of you have probably seen at least one baptism here. In the pond. The yucky, mucky pond. It would be even yuckier and even muckier if we didn't ask Bill Minter to stop down at the pond and clear off some of the algae. For those of you that went down into the pond at your baptism, you came back out with dirty feet.

Now take a look around. Not just at each other on the front row, but around the sanctuary. That's the group you became part of when you were baptized. Those of you that have been baptized, and those of you that I hope will make that choice someday, this is the kind of group you will be part of. I've heard it said that the church is one of the weirdest groups that we join. When someone says they want to be part of it, the first thing we do is throw them in the water to drown them. They don't do that at the Kiwanis Club!

But encouraging you to remember your dirty feet is another way of encouraging you to remember your baptism. Baptism isn't a one-time thing. Sure, the act of baptism only needs to happen one time, but it represents a conversion that often happens over and over. We can be saved in a dramatic way like Paul on the road to Damascus. We can also be like Peter and respond to Jesus call of invitation, and then mess up and need to repent and come back to Jesus. And then do it again. And again. And again. Remembering your baptism, remembering your dirty feet, is about remembering that you have made a commitment to Jesus Christ and to the church, and that you will choose to make that commitment again and again throughout the rest of your life. It's what we mean when we talk about "living into your baptism."

Remember your dirty feet.

And keep getting your feet dirty.

According to the bulletin, over the next months, you will head off to a bunch of different colleges. You'll move into a dorm, or an apartment, and you'll go to class. You'll go to class, right? Several of you will be going to Goshen College, and if you're like me 33 years ago, you might move into Kratz Hall. Kratz is a common name in some Mennonite congregations, but I can't think of the last Kratz to attend Waterford regularly. You may not know the name "Kratz," but the story of how Kratz Hall got its name is a story you should know.

Nearly 100 years ago, in the summer of 1920, Mennonites in what is now the Ukraine, sent a message to American Mennonites alerting them of the dire conditions in their war-torn homeland.

And Clayton Kratz was an outstanding student at Goshen College. He was president-elect of the on-campus student religious organization Y.P.C.A. when he accepted an appointment to be part of the first relief team formed by the newly formed Mennonite Central Committee. He was 23 years old when he arrived in Turkey and pressed on with his buddy Ori Miller for an inspection tour that ended up in the Ukrainian town of Halbstadt. Clayton stayed there while Ori returned to another town to arrange for the transport of relief supplies.

Before the relief program could get started the Red Army overran the Ukraine. The Russian Mennonites urged Clayton to flee, but he chose to stay as long as possible, believing that American relief workers as neutrals would be safe. He planned to leave the day before the White Army withdrew from Halbstadt but was trapped by an overnight advance of the Reds, who at first arrested him and then released him upon the pleas of the Mennonite leaders. Two weeks later he was again arrested, taken captive, and was never seen or heard from again. We still don't know the ultimate fate of Clayton Kratz.

Clayton Kratz got his feet dirty serving the kingdom of God as a young man in the Ukraine, and it cost him his earthly life. To my knowledge, there's no specific connection of Clayton Kratz to Waterford, other than perhaps in the motivation that it gave to M.J. Sharp, who earlier this year lost his life serving in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It was 16 years ago that M.J. was also taking part in the

graduation recognition Sunday, no doubt wondering where his life would lead. I'm sure he had no idea what his life would hold, but from his early days, it's clear that he too had a commitment to getting his feet dirty in God's work. M.J. got his feet dirty serving the kingdom of God, and it cost him his earthly life.

I have no idea whether it will cost your life to get your feet dirty for God. It might, or it might not. But even if it doesn't cost your life, I believe that you are called to get your feet dirty. I was struck that on the very same day that folks in Hesston (Kan.), here at Waterford, and in other places as well gathered to remember M.J.'s life in a memorial service, Lorraine Reinford posted a picture of her dad on Facebook.

Perhaps some of you remember going to Wayne Sommers' house when we did senior visits in Venture Club or JYF or MYF. Wayne was a gentle soul who always welcomed children and youth when we visited. At the same time M.J. was involved in a very visible life of passionate activism, Wayne was serving MCC as well, knotting comforters that could be sold at the Relief Sale. I was struck by the juxtaposition of these two passionate relief workers – a younger man passionately engaged on the front lines and a senior adult passionately engaged behind the scenes, living a life of prayer and generosity, supporting the M.J.s of the world. Both of them were getting their feet dirty for God.

Remember your dirty feet. And keep getting your feet dirty.

Finally, *come with your dirty feet.*

When I was a kid, each time my home congregation celebrated communion, we would wash feet as well. Washing each other's feet wasn't something that we saved for once a year at Maundy Thursday – communion and foot washing went hand in hand. When I first started to attend a congregation that celebrated communion without also washing feet, it felt odd to me, like something was missing. The model of Jesus washing the disciples' feet – the story Jackson read for us today – has always been a stirring example of servanthood to me, perhaps because being a servant doesn't come naturally for me. It was precisely because it *doesn't* come naturally, for example, that it was important to make footwashing a part of my ordination service several years ago.

A few weeks ago, we had a Maundy Wednesday service here at church, a service in which Pastor Katie did a wonderful job of teaching the children (and us adults who were listening in) the significance of this spiritual practice.

Over the course of that evening, I thought back to my preparation for the service. It had been a relatively warm day, and I'd had a long day at work, wearing dress socks and shoes. My feet were pretty sweaty. They weren't very lovely.

And so, in preparation for the footwashing service, rather than let someone else see and touch my sweaty feet, I soaked my feet in the bathtub at home. How pathetic is that – washing my feet to come to a footwashing service?

And that took me back to a communion service at least a dozen years ago. As background, in the church that I grew up in, communion was a two-week event. There's a verse in 1 Corinthians 11:27 that says that anyone who "eats and drinks this cup in an unworthy way is guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord" The next verse calls us to examine ourselves before we take part, so the week before communion, we were invited to reflect on our life in a service of confession and to confirm to the pastor that we were at peace with God and with our brothers and sisters and that by God's grace, we were prepared to take part in communion.

But on this Sunday, I was not at peace with God. I particularly was not at peace with my brothers and sisters in the congregation, since I felt some pretty significant anger towards a couple people. And so I did what seemed like the right thing to do, staying in my place back there about where _____ is sitting. I think it was during a pastoral transition of some kind, because our dear brother Wilmer Hollinger was involved in providing pastoral care on an interim basis. Sometime later, we were having a conversation, and I shared with him my reluctance to join in this particular sacrament on this particular day. I didn't feel worthy.

And I don't think I'll ever forget his response. "Lyle," he said in his gentle way, "Perhaps it's on the days like this, when we *don't* feel worthy, that it's most important for us to take part." And he went on to talk about how it's easy to be part of the church when the living is good, when we're feeling good about our lives and when everything is hunky-dory. But when we are struggling the most, when we are questioning our faith, is when it's most important to keep bringing our feet to this place of worship and thanksgiving.

My friends, there are going to be times when life stinks, when things are going bad, and the last place you want to be is in church, where everyone else seems to have it all together. Come with your dirty feet anyway.

Very possibly some of those times will come in the next several years. It's a time when there will be those around you who will encourage you to attend other congregations, even take a break from church, so that you have a chance to "find yourself."

I'm not one of those people. I hope you stay involved. I hope you come with your dirty feet and that you "find yourself" right here. I'm not suggesting that Waterford is the only place you can continue worshipping God, but I hope you consider it, and consider it strongly. Whether you are just down the road at Goshen College, or attending a college farther way, I hope your feet will find their way back here as often as possible – that you will bring your feet (along with the rest of your body, mind, and soul) to this place that loves you, no matter what you do.

Remember your dirty feet.

Keep getting your feet dirty.

And come with your dirty feet.

I began by talking about a verse in Isaiah, but I also made reference to the passage in John 13 where the evangelist tells the story of Jesus washing his disciples. The most powerful sermon on this passage that I've ever "heard" was from some of your colleagues when you were in Junior MYF.

You may remember Winter Youth Retreat, where we often had the assignment of making a video to illustrate a Bible story. When you were in sixth grade, here is what the eighth graders came up with:

Play video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LogcUIDn9wE>



For me, it was a good video until we got to the end. Then it became an awesome video. The wink wasn't part of the scene when we practiced it. But when Jesse added that, for me he captured the essence of what I want to leave you with this morning.

In the first service, I talked about being kissed by God at the beginning and end of each day. I believe that God does that. I also believe that Jesus winks at us regularly, with a message just for us.

- And with that wink, Jesus joyfully helps us to *remember the dirty feet of our baptism*, when we commit, again and again, to following him.
- With that wink, Jesus joyfully invites us to join him on the journey, a journey that *gets our feet dirty* in ways that we cannot yet imagine.
- And with that wink, Jesus joyfully invites us to *come with our dirty feet*, joining with our sisters and brothers here at Waterford and around the world, whether or not we are feeling worthy.

Thanks be to God, for the indescribable gift of our dirty feet. Amen.