

Gently and lovingly he takes your foot - places it in the cool water and washes it. You meet his eyes - what do you want to say to him. The dirt of the day is removed - set to one side - all that is experienced is the intimate presence of the Lord at your feet. He tenderly dries your foot. It feels refreshed and energised - renewed. He takes the other foot and washes that. There is no need for pretence - no need for shame or guilt - the Lord is with you intimate and unconditionally.



This is the Lord showing you how much he loves you. It is the spiritual dirt - one's errors that blocks off this experience of the Lord's presence. The Lord offers this service to you - He comes to serve - so that you can serve others likewise. As you come away from this upper room experience, remember that this is the Reality - and is open to you when you turn to the Lord in a vulnerable and humble state.

#### Experiential/Personal Reflection

We can choose to experience life in one of two ways; one when we are connected to our Divine Creator, at one with the loving compassion that is his essence and the other when we are immersed in ourselves, our wants, ills, and our need to control life. In the first we experience the oneness and unity of life; in the second life feels fragmented and full of conflict. These two diametrically opposed experiences are beautifully expressed in this quotation from Kahlil Gibran [from the book; *Sand and Foam*]:

It was but yesterday I thought myself a fragment  
quivering without rhythm in the sphere of life.  
Now I know that I AM the sphere,  
And all life in rhythmic fragments moves within me.

We can be a part of or dwell within Divine Love or we can choose to exist by ourselves in isolation. Swedenborg writes of evil being identified with disunion or separation from Divine Love (see *Arcana Caelestia* 4997). Even our thought of being 'not good enough' leads us away from being connected in love. Reflect on the quotation above; do you feel fragmented at this moment or are you at one with all that is and has being in God. Remind yourself, whatever place you are in at present, the Lord is there also.

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Five Essentials - Aspects of Loving - a focus for the Church  
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## Being loved - Freely, unconditionally, just as I am

**But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me."**

**"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne?"**

**Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me ..." declares the Lord.**

Isaiah 49: 14-16



**The LORD replied to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book."**

**Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin."**

Exodus 32:33-34

These two passages from the Bible have been deliberately chosen because of the contrast of their messages. Is this the same person, the same God, talking to us if on the one hand he says, "I will not forget you" and on the other "I will blot you out of my book."

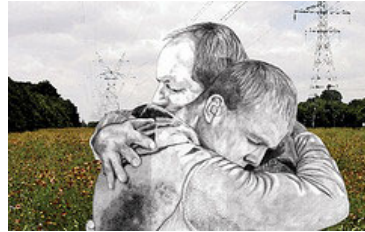
The latter sounds rather like the words of a parent, "if you do that I will not love you anymore," in contrast to "I love you to bits". What is the truth? Probably as parents or family we can identify with both at different times in our interactions with family members. But for God, the Isaiah quote tells the spiritual reality, the one from Exodus shows us what we expect - it's the appearance or illusion which we are living in at that particular moment. This doesn't make it true, we need to remember that although we often get stuck in an external, superficial viewpoint, it is possible for us to rise above this and view things from a higher spiritually mature state.



In our spiritual immaturity we believe that we will get

punished for doing wrong, making mistakes, failing. And this is often where we have to start from in our spiritual journey, with ideas of reward and punishment. If I do this action, there will be a consequence - it's the carrot and stick principle. Do you believe that God wants this sort of relationship with you? Is this a true idea of a loving God?

Our relationship with God may start out this way but he wishes for a mature spiritual relationship - he wants to call us friends and furthermore - beloved. He has set this before each of us, before our birth, the dream or vision of becoming a deeply joyful child of God. We are eternally beloved, God cannot do anything else than love each of us. He freely loves us, regardless of what we do, or have done or will do. But he is constrained by how much we are open to him. He does not recoil in horror at what we have done - rather he comes closer, as close as we will allow him.



'I will not forget you!'      'See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.'

Do not get fooled by our limited and external way of viewing life and ourselves and God. We often fall into the trap where we believe that our errors and failings shut us out of heaven and away from God's loving regard - this is not the truth. Always like the Lost son we can return and come home to the Lord's everlasting arms. As soon as we turn our face towards him we are there, in heaven, resting in his eternal love.

**The following are ideas of different ways you can explore and experience being loved freely, unconditionally, just as you are.**

### **Bible focus**

Read to yourself Isaiah 49:14-16 [quoted at the beginning] and Psalm 139. In the psalm notice where the Lord's presence is - with us in hell or heaven and in all of our life from beginning to end - everywhere and always.

**Where can I go from your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence?  
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;  
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.  
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
if I settle on the far side of the sea,  
even there your hand will guide me,  
your right hand will hold me fast.  
If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me  
and the light become night around me,"**

**even the darkness will not be dark to you;  
the night will shine like the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.  
If only you would slay the wicked, O God!  
Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?  
Psalm 139:7-12, and from 19 & 21**

Please note that the 'wicked' mentioned is anything in us that would separate us from the love of the Lord. This we need to come to recognise and reject, in the words of the psalm 'to hate' because it isolates us from our loving Lord.

**Teaching focus** (based on Isaiah 49:16)

**'See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.'**

'Engraving' means being written on the memory, on life and on the heart, so that which is engraved is everlasting and eternal. Being engraved on God's hands symbolises the reality that he never forgets us and has our eternal welfare in his loving gaze and active purpose.      based on Arcana Caelestia 9841:1, 9931

Also look at Arcana Caelestia 8620 & 8066

**'Your walls are ever before me.'**

Walls are a protection and defence - spiritually our beliefs are a protection from false ideas, or in contrast, our tightly held illusions can keep out the truths we don't want to see or are blind to at the moment. Walls that protect spiritual life are truths that we believe in - these the Lord provides and protects from being destroyed. He even allows us to keep our illusory ideas until we are ready to receive deeper insights, otherwise we would be totally annihilated by the truth - it would be too much in our present state.      see Arcana Caelestia 6419:2, 3131:3

**Meditation** (based on John 13:1-10)

Imagine that you are one of the disciples making your way to meet with the others and Jesus for the Passover feast. It is evening. Moonlight casts shadows along the narrow street; the doorways are dark and shut. You come to the house where the meal is ready - feel your way up the outside stairs, a hand against the rough wall - up to the upper room of the house. As you enter the door creaks and the oil lamps flicker making shadows move across the walls.

You wash your hands in the bowl at the door - the water is cool ... As you sit down you hear noises from outside - a door slams - there are voices in the street.

Food is ready on the table - bread freshly baked.

But Jesus stands up and takes off his outer coat and ties a towel around his waist.

He pours water into a bowl. He appears at your side and kneels down in front of you. You realise that he is going to wash your feet.