

Washing Feet

Category: Poems

written by Robert Fawcett | September 30, 2011

Robert Fawcett

Being thorough, I remove a holey sock
to view a diabetic man's filthy feet.
I use the time to complete our talk
of what drove him to live on the street
as I wonder how any of this can help.

While he tells me more of his medical past,
I run warm water into a stainless bowl.
I immerse both his feet and begin to ask
myself what good it does for this poor soul
to allow himself to undergo this ablution.

Silently I sluice the water between his toes
and soap the crusty callous at his heel.
I marvel at his arch and notice how closely
it fits my palm. I know he can feel
this proximity too. He shuts his eyes.

Months of useless layers peel away,
revealing layers useless weeks ago.
Removing the tough brown hide of yesterday
yields clean pink skin, but we both know
this ritual will be useless days from now.

Still, this moment may withstand time's test,
teaching us each lessons unknown before.
I learn the medicine of selflessness.
He learns what medicine is really for—
the hope that basin, soap and touch can bear.

About the poet:

Robert Fawcett is a family doctor with a masters in education and additional training in sports medicine. He was in private practice for nineteen years prior to joining the faculty of the York Hospital family medicine residency program. "I have always had an interest in poetry, but began writing more seriously about fifteen years ago, when I accidentally took part in a poetry workshop; my daughter was attending, and I'd arrived too early to pick her up. I was a regular at the monthly workshop thereafter and use poetry to reflect on my practice and on my life."

About the poem:

"This was an experience I had years ago that brought me an increased awareness of how important *care* is to medical care. Meeting patients on that

personal, humanistic level pays huge dividends in terms of both our understanding of the patient's disease state and the patient's understanding of (and adherence to) our recommendations."

Poetry editors:

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