

Thursday 28th March 2024

Maundy Thursday

Gospel Reading

John 13.1-17, 31-35

Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet

¹³ Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴ got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' ⁷ Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' ⁸ Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, 'One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.' ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'

¹² After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you?' ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

³¹ When Judas had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³² If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³ Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come." ³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

Other Readings: Exodus 12.1-4[5-10], 11-14

Psalm 116.1,10-17

1 Corinthians 11.23-26

Homily

The phrase Maundy Thursday comes from the Latin – Mandatum Novum – ‘a new commandment’, and it picks up on the final verses of our Gospel reading – “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

What is so new about Jesus’ commandment to love? There are about 850 laws written in the book of Leviticus – laws which any devout Jew would study and take to heart. And love is there too – Leviticus 19 “You will not exact vengeance on, or bear any sort of grudge against the members of your race, but will love your neighbour as yourself.” This commandment to love is sandwiched between the rules about administering justice fairly, and not interbreeding your cattle. But nevertheless, it is there, and it is a commandment to be obeyed – so even 2000 years ago, this was not a new commandment. Or was it?

The old law required you to love your neighbour as yourself. And therein lies the problem. For it is widely recognised that those who love themselves a lot, generally do not find the time to demonstrate that they love others. And so often, those who find it easy to demonstrate love and care for their fellow human beings, are those who, for some reason, find it difficult to love themselves.

What has changed, what is new, is the standard by which love is measured. Jesus said “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” With this new commandment, who and how I love is not determined by how I view myself, nor is it determined by how other’s view me.

Love is determined solely by the way that God loves me.

And that love was so graphically displayed by Jesus at that Passover Meal. Jesus got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples feet, and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

This act of foot-washing, which will be re-enacted in different Churches today, is a reminder to us that the love which God has for each of us, which we are called to emulate, knows no boundaries, is not a reward for service.

But can it really be for us? Which of us can say we have never felt the loneliness of thinking that we are unloveable? Which of us has not felt that we do not live up to the way God loves us? Surely Jesus would not kneel and wash my feet?

Think for a moment of the people in the upper room having their feet washed that evening:-

Peter – who would deny Jesus time and time again before the night was out.

James and John, who would fall asleep during Jesus’ final hours in the Garden.

The disciple who, in just a few hours, in anger and desperation, would use a sword to cut off a servant’s ear.

The disciples who would desert him and run away.

And of course, Judas, who would betray Jesus to the Jewish Authorities.

All these were loved by Jesus and had their feet washed by him. None were excluded.

There are many, many commentators who would tell you that what Jesus did was shocking. That foot-washing was reserved for the lowest of the low. That foot-washing was too menial a task even for a male slave, being reserved for women or children, or non-jewish male slaves. But Jesus' act of foot-washing was more than shocking.

There is, perhaps, a sense in which when Jesus stood up, took off his robe, and put on a towel, so he recreated his own incarnation - that moment when the all-powerful God took off his omnipotence and his infinite glory, and put on humanity. For God, becoming a human being was every bit as demeaning as Jesus, the master, kneeling to wash the disciples feet.

And so today we remember that God did all that, and more, for me. And he did it out of love. Amen

Conversation Questions

1. Would you be willing for Jesus to wash your feet?
2. Is there anyone we need to learn to love as Jesus loves? How might we begin?
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

God our Father,
you have invited us to share in the supper
which your Son gave to his Church
to proclaim his death until he comes:
may he nourish us by his presence,
and unite us in his love;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

(or)

God our Father,
your Son Jesus Christ was obedient to the end
and drank the cup prepared for him:
may we who share his table

watch with him through the night of suffering
and be faithful.

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