

## Maundy Thursday 2024

1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

What are the disciples anticipating when they enter the room for their evening meal on this particular occasion? The days leading up to this have been tumultuous. At times Jesus appeared tense and distracted, and at other times seemingly maudlin, weeping over Jerusalem and talking of his death and the end of the world.

Then there was that ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, a moment of triumph, like a conquering king, albeit on the wrong mount. Jesus was clearly building up to something, something momentous. Was he going to make a push to establish the kingdom of God now in Jerusalem, defeating those who opposed it? And if so, what roles would he assign to the disciples? After all, he had previously delegated to them healing the sick and preaching the good news of the kingdom.

Now what would their part be in the forthcoming event, whatever that was? Is there a mood of excitement among the disciples as they gather for the meal? Maybe they perceive a greater measure of confidence in Jesus, a new determination. Then what happens?

*Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so...* So! What does he do? Assign them all tasks for the coming crusade? Set out an action plan?

No, he washes the disciples' feet. **Because** Jesus knew who he was, **because** he knew he was divine, **because** he knew he had divine power to do anything he chose, because, because... he chooses to wash feet.

Now guests to a meal would bathe before they came but their feet would become soiled and dusty as they walked through the dirt streets in sandals to get to the venue. And it was the job of a servant to wash the guests' feet on arrival. But Jesus and his disciples had no servant; presumably the disciples took turns to do this menial task. And obviously a bowl, water and towel had been left ready for them in the room that they hired.

But none of them did it. We know that they were inclined to argue between themselves as to which one of them was the greatest. Luke tells us that they even continue to do so during the last supper.

None of them is prepared to demean himself and stoop low enough to do a servant's task and wash feet. There they are in the middle of the meal, reclining with their dirty feet in each other's faces. But even that isn't enough for one of disciples to get up and do it.

But Jesus does. The greatest among them, the one who knew that he had come from God and was returning to God, is the one who washes their feet, including Judas's.

What is Jesus teaching here? Well, clearly, it is that being servants of one another is part of community, of fellowship, of agape, of greatness.

*Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.*

Jesus is, of course, thinking wider than just dirty feet; there are other needs.

But there is also another message, as identified by the conversation between Jesus and Peter.

Because Jesus is not only talking about physical cleanliness of the body but also about spiritual cleanliness of the soul.

At this point in time, of course, the disciples don't have any concept of being washed in the blood of the Lamb as Christians do now, but they knew of baptism for the forgiveness of sins and had put their faith in Jesus. And it is the lack of belief in Jesus that renders Judas, Judas who is planning to betray Jesus, unclean.

So if they, or we, have been bathed metaphorically through faith and baptism then we have no need to be washed in baptism again. But we do need our feet to be washed, to continually come to the Lord and confess the areas where we fall short of holiness and Christlike behaviour and so pick up dirt as we walk through life.

We need our feet to be washed by Jesus. And we have the opportunity for a spiritual foot washing in the Eucharist that will follow, as we confess our sins and take bread and wine.

In our gospel reading Jesus does indeed commission the disciples for his mission, set out the action plan, but not in the way that I suspect the disciples envisaged.

*“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

Note this is an imperative. *You **must** love one another.* The people around us will know something about Jesus if we love one another as Jesus loved us while on earth.

Now how was this? I suggest that this is something that we might want to discuss together, perhaps in a home group.

And note also that the command to love one another as Jesus has loved us is a step beyond, a step up, from the command to love our neighbour as ourselves.

On the bottom-line Jesus loved his disciples selflessly; he did not think himself above others, even though he was. He gave of himself. It was love that drove him to stoop to wash dirty feet.

And he loved his disciples with patient forgiveness, repeatedly explaining his teaching about his death and resurrection, enduring their foibles and arguments without it diminishing his regard and care for them, even knowing that in the end they would desert him in one way or another.

And Jesus loved sacrificially. He did not stop loving just because it was painful, inconvenient or hard.

Love like this is not a warm cosy feeling. It is a decision, a decision that results in action. It may be inconvenient or costly. But action it must be if it is to be visible to the community around us.

Jesus showed love by washing feet just **because** of who is. Who are we? What is our “because” that will lead us to love in action?

*A new command I give you: Love one another* Amen  
Chris Shaw, 28 March 2024