

Maundy Thursday 2nd April 2026

Remembering is a very important part of both Jewish and Christian faith. Remembering the past, remembering ancient rituals, remembering what God has done for us does make a difference now.

Do this in remembrance of me – that's what Luke says in Luke 22. Paul says the same in our Corinthians reading. When Jesus blessed the bread and wine and shared it with the disciples at the Last Supper, he was asking them to do it in order to remember him.

Of course Jesus wasn't inventing a new tradition. Moses' institution of the celebration of the Passover was in order to remember God's rescue of the Israelites from Egypt, to give thanks for their salvation. The blood of the Lamb sacrificed on the first Passover became a human reality on Good Friday when Jesus sacrificed himself on the Cross for us..

But John being John, he doesn't write about what Paul and the three other Gospel writers write about, i.e. the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup.

No, he focuses on something completely different, so different that none of the other writers even sees fit to mention it. Clearly I am talking about the washing of the disciples' feet when Jesus humbled himself and acted as their servant, reminding his disciples of their need for humility.

It's also worth noting that John's version of the Last Supper takes up five chapters or 23% percent of the entire Gospel and it starts with the foot washing. And that has to be significant.

For John the most important aspect of the Last Supper was love, and it's from that that we get Maundy Thursday. Maundy comes from the Latin *mandatum novum* or in English a new command. And Jesus gave his disciples a new command. To love each other. Just as he had loved them. In other words the new command was about the quality of love they were to display. He loved them to the end, even as his time had finally come.

Even when Jesus knew his back was metaphorically against the wall, he chose to continue to love rather than say choose either the path of non-resistance or the path of violent resistance. He made that choice against a backdrop of chaos, threat and violence. And we live in very similar times today, don't we just?

And one way of demonstrating that love was by washing the disciples' feet – an act that was totally countercultural for a rabbi.

Now I don't think Jesus meant that the only way for the disciples to love each other in the way He had loved them was to make a career out of washing other people's feet. What

matters is desiring to serve others with an attitude of love. Jesus exemplifies that in spades by washing Judas' feet moments before Judas leaves to betray him.

And that wasn't a one-off when you think that of the 11 remaining disciples only one had the courage to be at the crucifixion the following day. Jesus' actions were truly love in action, servanthood in action. And we are called to love in the same way – which we all know can be challenging and indeed costly. Could we bring ourselves to wash the feet of someone we knew was imminently going to let us down or even betray us?

Most of us would like to think that we would love Jesus to wash our feet. But isn't the truth that we're probably more like Simon Peter than we care to admit and that we would probably resist the offer. Wouldn't we feel that it should be the other way round, that we should be washing his feet?

Why did Simon Peter say no? Why would we say no? Perhaps he didn't want to feel so exposed, or perhaps there were issues he didn't want to face up to, an embarrassment he wanted to keep hidden, or most likely, he didn't feel worthy enough. I think that latter feeling is a sentiment we would all admit to. But whatever the cause of Simon Peter's initial refusal, I suspect the underlying reason was the unspoken question – Am I enough?

The truth, and it is an important truth, is that while we almost certainly think we are not enough, God thinks the exact opposite – that we are indeed enough – for all our faults and foibles.

So the real question we need to answer is are we willing to receive the love of Jesus in the manner and at the time he offers it to us? It's relatively easy to do in times of need as long as it's offered in a way that suits us. But what neither of those apply? That can be a very different matter.

So important as the bread and wine are, without God's love for us and our love for each other, the Eucharist has little meaning. Do this in remembrance of me doesn't just mean remembering that Jesus existed and chose to go to the Cross to save us from our own sins, it means remembering what motivated Jesus to what he did and trying to be imitators of Christ by humbling ourselves, becoming servant-like and loving each other just as he loved us.

In a sense it is odd, is it not, that of the two things Jesus did with his disciples the night before he died, both of which he only did once in his lifetime, we do one every week and the other once a year and in some denominations never.

Perhaps it's the way round it is because eating bread and drinking wine is easier, it doesn't really expose us in any way, whereas having our feet washed is something very intimate and requires us to acknowledge our vulnerability. And we don't like doing that.

Yet we know, because the Gospel writers tell us, that Jesus very clearly acknowledged his vulnerability – to his friends, but above all to God. And what is good enough for Jesus is certainly good enough for us.