

Maundy Thursday 9.04.20

John 13.1-1-17,31b – 35

Having loved his own who were in the world he loved them to the end

(Jn.13.1)

On Jesus' last evening on earth, despite knowing that he was about to be betrayed by one of his own beloved disciples and

would soon be tortured and cruelly executed, did not flee and go into hiding. He remained to the end, resolutely obedient to his Father, and so glorified God and in turn was glorified himself.

Everything he did that evening was an act of true love. For those with eyes to see, this night reveals the true depth of God's love for the world. Here Jesus revealed not only the meaning of love, but also taught his

disciples how to live in the world, loving and serving God and one another.

And so, that evening, Jesus modeled loving community. Through the last fellowship meal they shared together, he gave them a way to remember, to celebrate and give thanks for his life, death and resurrection; a place to meet with the Lord and receive from him all that they needed, into the years and centuries ahead.

Loving them to the end, Jesus prayed for their protection in the days ahead (Jn.16.15), standing between them and the authorities in the Garden of Gethsemane. His love was offered even to Judas, who chose to reject it.

Our reading tonight focuses though on just one part of that evening - Jesus act of washing his disciples' feet - the act of the most menial slave.

On one level, it teaches us so much about service. Jesus knew the propensity of human beings to lord it over each other. James and John had tried to play that game when they asked Jesus to allow them to sit at his left and right in the kingdom. So Jesus models what true loving service means. We too are called to metaphorically kneel, humbly honouring each other as beloved children of God, recognizing what a privilege it is to serve God in serving one another. There

have been many examples of true loving service in recent days, people who have even given their own lives in service of others.

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends (John 15.13)

But there is more to Jesus' action than a wonderful example of loving service to one another. In time his followers will see that it

points to the meaning of his sacrificial death - the love that will go as far as it takes to save his people.

Why did Judas decide at that moment to carry out his plan of betrayal? Was it that he couldn't accept a leader who so demeaned himself in this way? Without understanding, he allowed his feet to be washed, but didn't allow his heart to respond with love and thankfulness in return.

Peter refused to allow Jesus to wash his feet - why I wonder?

Did he feel guilty, recognising his own failings - he should have been the one to wash his master's feet? Did he too feel that such an act was demeaning to his master?

Why, I wonder, do we find it so difficult to allow Jesus to wash our feet?

Is it our pride - I can wash my own feet,
thank you! I don't need your help Jesus
today. I'll ask when I need help, but today I'm
OK thank you.

Like Peter we may be quite happy to serve
Jesus, albeit through serving one another,
but perhaps we are more reticent about
allowing him to serve us? It may seem like
weakness to be served rather than to serve.

Sometimes, like Peter, we may be too self-
sufficient, too self-confident.

Or perhaps we recognise our own
unworthiness, our own sinfulness.

We can do 'humble' - in fact sometimes
we're rather good at it - we'd rather
emulate the woman who washed Jesus' feet
and dried them with her hair, groveling in
her sins, than visualize Jesus kneeling at our
own feet, serving us.

But Jesus said, *'You did not choose me, but I chose you'* (Jn.15.19)

I chose to wash *your* feet. Can we allow him to wash our feet tonight?

Because, Jesus says to Peter, *'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me'* (13.8).

Unless we accept what Jesus did for us through his Passion, we have no share in the benefits of his Resurrection.

I wonder too if perhaps the image of God kneeling humbly before us is in some way offensive. That's not the way we want to think about God even though Jesus is revealing to this facet of Him to us here.

Today and every day, God in Christ waits, kneeling at our feet, asking to be allowed to

serve us, asking our permission to wash away our sins. Every day we are offered his life, and we have the freedom to accept or reject it.

But that requires our submission and our realisation of our need of God. As we do this we realise too how vulnerable we all are and how much we need to love and care for each other.

If this is what his foot-washing signifies, surely we can only weep with gratitude and humility. Then we do not have to fear the judgment of an authoritative God.

At the end of tonight's reading Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment - that you love one another as I have loved you - what a challenge, what a calling.

A challenge we cannot hope to fulfil without the help of one another and the help of the Holy Spirit. That is what living in a Christian community is all about. Amen.

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