

## Maundy Thursday Reflections – 9<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Let us pray that we may love one another as Christ has loved us.

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.  
Amen.

### **John 13:1-17, 31b-35**

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. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, 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. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' 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.' For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'

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? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.'

Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 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." I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

### **Reflection**

This year, there are two parts of the Maundy Thursday service that have captured my attention. The first is foot washing; and the second is the celebration of Holy Communion as a recollection of the Last Supper that Jesus shared with his disciples shortly before his crucifixion. I think perhaps my attention has been drawn to these two things because of our current circumstances. Social

distancing makes washing someone's feet impossible. I guess we could lob a bucket of water at someone, but somehow that just doesn't capture the essence of that loving, humble act that Jesus performed at the Last Supper. And similarly, we are currently denied the joy of sharing meals together and of receiving communion side by side.

All of which has led me to think about the deeper meaning of these acts and how they may still have relevance in our current situation.

If we recognise that foot washing is about service – about being prepared to serve one another – we realise how appropriate that image is at this time. We think of those hundreds of thousands of people who have signed up as NHS volunteers, and of course nurses and doctors on the frontline continue to serve us as they always have, though with much more risk to themselves. More than that, though, neighbours across the country are finding ways to help one another, checking that everyone has what they need and being prepared to find creative ways to gather shopping and leave it at the doorstep, keeping our appropriate distances. Some local grocery businesses have started operating delivery services to ensure that people don't go hungry. Our instinct to reach out to one another – in compassion and indeed in service – has not been diminished by the restrictions on physically reaching out.

There are resonances, too, in our current situation, for our reflections on the Lord's Supper. You will know people refer to the service of Holy Communion in different ways. We might think of the term "mass" as being more Roman Catholic; and some prefer the term "Eucharist". If we think of each of these words, we realise how relevant Maundy Thursday is to our current existence. Eucharist actually means "thanksgiving" and we have become a more thankful nation over the past weeks. I expect most of you have found yourselves on your doorsteps on a Thursday evening at 8 pm, and it is quite spine-tingling to hear the applause from far further than the eye can see as we all express our gratitude to those working on the front line.

In Holy Communion we recognise that the Body of Christ is made up of each one of us. That we are not called to compare ourselves with one another but rather to recognise and value the part that each individual plays – and to understand that the whole will always be greater than the sum of the parts. This situation has forced us to recognise the value of some roles that we may previously have considered insignificant. Never have we valued our supermarket workers and delivery drivers so highly. In not seeing people – colleagues; friends; those we used to bump into when out for a walk or a trip to the shops – we might come to better understand and value the part all kinds of individuals play in our lives. And of course we are all discovering new ways to come together, whether a conversation at a safe distance while out for a daily walk, or the wonders of technology bringing friends and family onto our computer screens.

That word "mass" actually comes from the end of the service, the words "Ite, missa est", the words of dismissal, like our "go in peace to love and service the Lord". To which the answer is "deo gratias" or "thanks be to God". Our freedom to go out into the world in the ways we are used to has been significantly curtailed. And yet we are all finding new ways of "being sent". None of us would choose these circumstances, but sometimes being forced to think differently about our discipleship and how we make Christ known is helpful. We remember that we witness in thought, word and deed. Whether it is by keeping in contact with people; in daily prayer; in getting groceries for our neighbours; each of us is witnessing to God's love and the light of Christ in the world.

So, Maundy Thursday may be different this year. But perhaps we have an opportunity to connect more deeply with the truths that lie at the heart of our faith, reaching out to one another in love and service in whatever ways these circumstances allow.

### **Intercessions**

In the power of the Spirit let us pray to the Father through Christ the saviour of the world.

Father,  
on this, the night he was betrayed,  
your Son Jesus Christ washed his disciples' feet.  
We commit ourselves to follow his example of love and service.  
Lord, hear us  
and humble us.

On this night, he prayed for his disciples to be one.  
We pray for the unity of your Church.  
Lord, hear us  
and unite us.

On this night, he prayed for those who were to believe through his disciples' message.  
We pray for the mission of your Church.  
Lord, hear us  
and renew our zeal.

On this night, he commanded his disciples to love,  
but suffered rejection himself.  
We pray for the rejected and unloved.  
Lord, hear us  
and fill us with your love.

On this night, he reminded his disciples  
that if the world hated them it hated him first.  
We pray for those who are persecuted for their faith.  
Lord, hear us  
and give us your peace.

On this night, he accepted the cup of death  
and looked forward to the new wine of the kingdom.  
We remember those who have died in the peace of Christ.  
Lord, hear us  
and welcome all your children into paradise.

## **Closing Prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
you have taught us  
that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters  
we do also for you:  
give us the will to be the servant of others  
as you were the servant of all,  
and gave up your life and died for us,  
but are alive and reign, now and for ever.  
Amen.