

**Maundy Thursday reflection by Revd Frances
for your evening prayers, or for any time of the day**

John 13.1-15, Jesus washes the disciples' feet

I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you...
Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another (John 13.15 & 34)

I will be reading the Maundy Thursday gospel in my own home for the first time in as long as I can remember. It will be the same for you. But the image of the disciples gathered for supper on the eve of the Passover serves as a promise of our future gathering for Holy Communion when that becomes possible.

During our Lent Course we have been looking at the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet in order to gain deeper insights into what Jesus teaches us by example about the love of the Father. He demonstrates for the disciples and for us the quality of meekness, one of the beautiful attitudes (beatitudes) which he himself described in the Sermon on the Mount. Meekness, as defined in modern day dictionaries, has lost its lustre as an attractive quality. But we can reclaim it as an essential attribute of the citizens of God's kingdom. It is not the passivity of submission, but a dynamic quality. It sustains relationships and keeps us on the right path.

Jesus embodies this in his life and teaching, no more so than in his washing of the disciples' feet on his last night on earth. Knowing that God the Father has given all things into his hands, he might be expected to take the place of honour at the supper table. But Jesus' whole ministry, from the temptation in the wilderness to this moment, has been given over to the discernment of God's will. The meek are those who make themselves available to God for his purposes. In so doing, we discover that God is the one in whose service we find perfect freedom - but this can be difficult and costly.

Jesus' humble action anticipates his own death. Crucifixion was a shameful and humiliating, as well as a painful, death (it was in part death by suffocation). The footwashing points to the challenge to follow Jesus and lay down one's life in the service of God and neighbour. So, when Peter objects to Jesus washing him, it reflects his objection to Jesus going to the cross and its implications for him personally. He foresees hard times ahead.

But even in the hardest times, like the current global spread of coronavirus, there is always hope. Jesus went to the cross so that our own journey into the valley of the shadow of death need never be alone, need never be the end. Beside and inside every person in hospital or at home, struggling to breathe, Christ suffers; he has been where they are. And by his spirit, he joins together those who cannot be physically together, as he prays for us all to the Father.

However dark the situation, however real and present our fear, we know that fear does not have the last word, just as death does not. Life overcomes death, just as love overcomes fear. When Judas leaves the table and goes out into the night, Jesus tells the disciples to love one another. Their love for one another, as indeed our love for our neighbours, is the way in which Jesus will remain present in the world. He remains present through the new community of those who share his bread, let him wash their feet and live accordingly.

Jesus said, 'Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.'



The Garden of Gethsemane

Collect for Maundy Thursday

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. **Amen.**