

Reflection for Maundy Thursday 2020

Text: John 13: 2a-5, 12-17

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 wrapped around him.

After he had washed their feet, had out 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.

The tension in that Upper Room must already have been tangible as those thirteen men gathered to eat the meal which was to live on down the centuries as The Last Supper. Jerusalem at Passover time was always a pulsating, feverish city where everyone sensed the heightened drama of this annual commemoration of the Passover. The Passover when God's angel had swept across the habitations of the people of the land of Egypt bring death to all the first born, both human and animal, except where the doors were marked with the blood of first- born lambs. Here no death occurred as inside the people, the people of Israel, made ready to make their escape from the slavery to which they had been subjected for so long.

But this year the tension, the sense of impending drama had been escalated ever since less than a week ago this man Jesus had ridden into the city on a donkey, a beast of burden. In the following days he had continued to provoke and infuriate the Jewish authorities and with each new encounter, each new challenge the desire to be rid of this scourge, this troublemaker, this imposter grew ever stronger and more determined.

Those disciples gathered in that room must have known all this and known too that it was not just Jesus who was in danger. No, their association with this man meant that they too were marked out and far from safe. I would not have been surprised if even now some of them were urging Jesus to just pack up and leave. But if they did their pleas would have gone unheard; Jesus could and would not turn back now; His hour had come! His hour in which to show not

just those disciples, not just the populace of Jerusalem but the world what His divine purpose was; ‘And I when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’

And now occurs that first example of how He intends to draw people to Himself and it was one that took those bemused disciples completely by surprise. Jesus, their Lord, their Master, the man to whom they looked up to and revered more than any other person they knew or had ever known removed his robe and wrapped a towel around his waist and then, could this really be happening? , he knelt to wash their dirty, grime encrusted, calloused and hardened feet with his bare hands. This was the most menial servant’s task; how could this be happening? What looks of bewilderment and astonishment must have passed between these men as their feet were gently held within Jesus’ hands and cleansed of all that dirt, all that grime before being caressed dry by the towel he wore around his waist. As I imagine that scene, I sense a growing atmosphere of awe and of wonder and a silence falling upon the room as each man’s feet of pilgrimage were cleansed. Feet of pilgrimage which had followed in the footsteps of Christ on His journey towards Calvary; feet of pilgrimage which, after His death, His resurrection, would continue to walk in those same footsteps but now in the certain knowledge that they were those of Christ, the Son of God, the Redeemer and Saviour of the world.

And then when all those feet had been washed Jesus put on His robe again and began to explain what he had done and what they were now being called to do. He had shown them as he knelt in front of them and bathed those aching, tired feet the supreme depths of His humility. He had as it were sunk to the bottom in performing the most menial and despised tasks. What person of any standing would sink so low? But God in His infinite wisdom sent His Son so that all might understand that no matter to which level the vagaries of life had assigned them God **would** be there too. He was there in the dirt and muck of that stable in Bethlehem and He was there in the most degrading death that could be devised. God kneels at the feet of the homeless and the refugees just as he does at the feet of royalty and world leaders.; the despised and neglected, the feted and honoured.

Such humility; and that is what those privileged disciples witnessed and were called to emulate in their lives. They were given the clearest of instructions; ‘So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash each other’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you should also do as I have done to you.’ Again I do wonder if a few looks were exchanged around that table; looks that conveyed a certain disbelief at just what they were being asked to do; looks that might even have said ‘No way am I washing anyone’s feet’ for isn’t that what

we too might have felt? Humility is perhaps the most difficult of virtues to acquire and even with a life time's practice we can still find it hard to metaphorically kneel and wash the feet of those whose path through life has left them stained with the dirt and grime of the world's evils.

The touching of those feet in that Upper Room was a touching which conveyed the reality of the care and the love which God has for us His children. He touches us in the depths of our broken lives; the gutters of life swollen by the sins that we are all capable of both as individuals and as members of a global world. Today a miniscule virus has brought the world to its knees and it is surely there that we are called to remember Christ's example and notice the feet that are in front of our faces, look up, and see the person to whom they belong and their need for our ministrations in Christ's name and following His example of unfettered humility. No we cannot actually wash those feet but we can do so much by our display of caring, really caring and washing then with the warm water of sympathy, the warm water of listening; the warm water of blessing and then gently drying those feet in the soft fabric of prayer. Such touching, such holding will surely bring us the blessing of having our own feet washed and freed of the dirt of sin and dried by Christ and dried in the warmth of His love for us.

Reach out by Ian Adams

You see what you want to see.

There's something good about that.

In that kind of seeing, you are already re-shaping the world as you long for it to be.

But the invitation (and challenge) is to see what truly is.

Look closely, deeply, carefully-

and both the wonder and toughness of everything

will be revealed.

This is a demanding task.

And your seeing will never be the same again

