

<b>Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2015</b> <b>Cathedral, Grahamstown</b> <b>6 p.m.</b>		<b>Maundy Thursday</b> <b>The Evening Eucharist of</b> <b>the Lord's Supper</b>
Exodus 12:1-14	Ps 116:11-18	1 Corinthians 11:23-26
		John 13:1-15
<b>Love one another</b>		

“Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” (Jn 13:1b)

### **1<sup>st</sup> POINT – Maundy Thursday**

Today marks the beginning of the Triduum, the Three Great Days that spell out our salvation – Maundy Thursday; Good Friday; Easter Day. We walk with Jesus through all that happens tonight, and receive the new commandment to love one another; on Good Friday we gather at the foot of the cross “as those who know that Christ will be victorious in the battle against darkness, sin and death.”<sup>1</sup> On Easter Day we celebrate our Lord’s resurrection.

Today is known as Maundy Thursday. The name “Maundy” comes from the Latin words, *mandatum novum*, “a new commandment” that Jesus gave, to love one another as I have loved you (John 13:34).

Tonight is a night on which we remember the great things that God has done – the Passover; liberation from slavery; the act of God in Christ; the gift of his body and blood. When we remember, we “bring to the present”, we relive these great events. And as we remember, we are “re-remembered” – we are made members once again of the body of Christ, the church of God.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> POINT – The footwashing**

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<sup>1</sup> Jenneker, *Word & Worship 2012 - 2013*, 93

So what happened at the meal that evening? “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” (Jn 13:1b)  
Wrapping a towel around his waist, Jesus took a bowl and water, and washed the feet of his disciples, and told them to follow his example and wash one another’s feet.

Some have taken him literally. All over the world, tonight, at this service, priests are washing feet. Pope Francis caused a huge stir a year or two back when he chose to wash the feet of twelve prisoners – including a woman – and not all of them were Roman Catholic! What would it mean to wash the feet of outsiders, people not part of our Christian community?

To wash one another’s feet is part of servant leadership, as we follow the example of Christ, who came not to be served but to serve. It is part of loving one another.

Let’s avoid the arrogance which says, “Others must serve me, must wash my feet – it’s their job”.

Let’s avoid the false humility of Peter which says, “I am not worthy to have my feet washed”.

Let’s not have the attitude which says, “I don’t need my feet washed – I have no need.”

Jesus loved them “to the end” (Jn 13:1b). To the last. To the end of the road, never giving up on them. Tonight it is Jesus who washes our feet, because he never gives up on us.

The disciples ran away in fear at his arrest: there may be times when we run away and hide our face rather than stand with Jesus in courageous witness. Jesus washes our feet.

Peter denied knowing Jesus: there may be times when we find it easier or more convenient to deny that we are a Christian, or that we go to

church, or that our values and beliefs are different from others. Jesus washes our feet.

Judas betrayed Jesus: there may be times when we do the same, when we turn against the one who loves us the most. Jesus loves us nevertheless, and washes our feet.

The disciples slept while Jesus agonised and wept in the Garden of Gethsemane: there may be times when we sleep while others face the danger. Jesus loves us nevertheless, and washes our feet.

The disciples failed Jesus miserably at a time of his greatest challenge and his greatest need: there may be times when we do the same, when we take the easy option, when we walk away from someone who needs us. Jesus loves us nevertheless, and washes our feet.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> POINT – We wash one another’s feet**

And, like Jesus, we wash one another’s feet – the feet of our friends. Of our families. Of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

I prepared this sermon the week after vigorous protests had been taking place on the campus of the University of Cape Town, as well as strident debates here on the Rhodes campus, about the legacy of Cecil John Rhodes, the appropriateness or otherwise of his statue at UCT, the use of his name for Rhodes University, the Rhodes Scholarship, and related issues. None of us find these debates easy, and it is hard at times for people to talk and reflect in a way that shows respect for one another. Anger clouds our judgement. Archbishop Desmond Tutu would often quote his own father who, in times of strong disagreement, would say, “Don’t raise your voice. Improve your argument.”

The Cathedral is a community of great diversity – language, background, culture, education, outlook, our varied experiences of injustice, struggle, suffering, dislocation. There is so much that can

divide us, separate us, alienate us from one another. But what we offer to debates and interactions about issues that deeply divide us, is the underlying and life-changing reality and truth that we are brothers and sisters in Christ. We have been baptised into one body. We have been given of the one Holy Spirit to drink. We belong together. We are given a new commandment, to love one another as Christ has loved us, by laying down his life for us all. We are called to use a different narrative, a different sort of language, and to live it out in our lives: a language of peace, reconciliation, forgiveness, love for one another, truth, respect, and courtesy. That doesn't of course solve all our problems. But at least it is a basis for our conversation, and it is the foundation for our relationships.

We find the same shocking truth when we encounter issues of power and control. Power is a reality. People are placed in positions of power and responsibility and authority, to work and lead, to make decisions, and to exercise power. Like many things, power is open to being misused. We know how people in power can be abusive, or cruel, or controlling, blind to their own faults, self-centred. At the same time, we know how people in power can use their positions for great good, how they can be examples of service, of humility, of dedication. What a gift a wise, holy leader can be to a school, a place of work, a university, a church, a country. What is our model and example? Those in authority are called to follow the example of Jesus, who washed the feet of his disciples, and who came as one who serves.

Being baptised into Christ as a new community of brothers and sisters, washing one another's feet, loving and forgiving, carrying one another's burdens – this is a whole new way of relating to one another. This is the alternative community of the kingdom of God, the Easter people, people of the resurrection.

My prayer is that we as the Cathedral community – you and me, us together – may be people of forgiveness and love, people of honesty and truth-speaking, people who stand up for what is right, people who

defend others from bullying and abuse, people who wash one another's feet.

Tonight as we share in the Lord's Supper, the meal of freedom, we wash one another's feet as we acknowledge the bruises and heartaches and struggles that we endure on our journey together with Christ. We are not playing games here. You and I are here because we carry the cross of Christ; we have poured out our lives for the Gospel, we have given of ourselves – we have left everything and followed Jesus – we have made huge sacrifices – we have this vision, this dream of the kingdom of God, the world as it should be, our community - Grahamstown, our country - as a place where all live at peace, where there is no poverty, where we have water, where schools and clinics are all in good order, where people have work and do not live in fear, where our children are safe – isn't that why we are alive? Isn't that why we work and dream and pray and struggle? With the strength and help of God? And we know what it costs us.

Tonight, as we wash one another's feet, we do so because we need Jesus to wash away the heartache, the disillusionment, the sadness, the bitterness, that can so easily sour our life together. This is a time to cherish one another. To say that we matter deeply to one another. That in spite of the irritations and frustrations, the way we let one another down, or disappoint one another, that we do love one another, deeply. We are part of the church, which is this wonderful God-guided community of those who believe; but it is also a community of you and me, and we don't always get it right. So we wash one another's feet, tonight, and as we do so, it is Christ who is washing our feet. Forgiving. Cherishing. Loving. Healing.

## **CONCLUSION**

Like Jesus, may we continue to love to the end.

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (Jn 13:35).

As we come now to the foot-washing, there are four foot-washing stations – one up near the altar; at the font; and in the Lady Chapel. I encourage as many of us as possible to take part in this deeply symbolic ceremony.