

Thursday 13th April 2017 Cathedral, Grahamstown 6 p.m.		Maundy Thursday The Evening Eucharist of the Lord's Supper	
Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14	Ps 116:1-2, 11- 18	1 Corinthians 11:23-26	
		John 13:1-17, 31b-35	
Love one another			

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

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.”¹ 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), in our Gospel reading.

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 Christ, the church of God.

¹ Jenneker, *Word & Worship 2012 - 2013*, 93

The footwashing

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.

We are called to follow his example, both literally and symbolically. All over the world, tonight, at this service, priests are washing feet. But it is an example of service and care, and of leadership, that we take out into the world.

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. Next time, perhaps...

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. And next time, Peter stood firm...

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, 2

when we take the easy option, when we walk away from someone who needs us. Jesus loves us nevertheless, and washes our feet.

We wash one another's feet

And especially at this time in our country, with so much division, fear, anger, resentment, we are called to wash one another's feet. It defines the sort of people, the type of community, we are. There is no-one so good, so holy, that they don't need their feet washed. There is no-one so bad that they are excluded from this gathering. There is no-one so important that they can stand aloof while the rest of us carry on serving. Foot-washing helps to keep us all on the same level. And we have the Great Commandment – to love one another – and we are to love one another even when others fail us; when others run away and desert us; when others turn their backs on us and deny knowing us; when others betray us or backstab us. Jesus did not give up on his disciples. Let's not give up on one another.

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. To do what is right and best for others. If we are in authority, we ask – what is best for those under us? Those we lead? It is part of loving one another. And let's avoid the arrogance which says, "Others must serve me, must wash my feet – it's their job" – or the false humility of Peter which says, "I am not worthy to have my feet washed" or the attitude which says, "I don't need my feet washed – I have no need."

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, many of us, 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 families, 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 often get it wrong. 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).

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