

Maundy Thursday reflection – 9th April 2020

Readings: 1 Cor. 11.23-26; John 13.1-17, 31b-35

This evening we remember the last meal that Jesus ever shared with his disciples. When Jesus blessed and broke the bread, and blessed and passed the cup of wine, he invited his friends to 'do this in remembrance of me.' That invitation is extended down the centuries to those who still call ourselves his friends and followers. It is central to our identity. Many people still gather regularly to accept that invitation from Jesus, to share in that bread which he declares to be his body, and that wine which he declares to be his blood. For us they are physical, tangible signs that we belong to him, part of the body of Christ visible on earth, the Church. When we partake together of bread and wine in the way that Christ commanded, we join with the Church across time and space, down the centuries, in heaven and on earth. Maundy Thursday is when we remember the beginning of that meal, which is still going on, day by day, week by week, down the years and the centuries and into eternity.

But Maundy Thursday is also a time for reminding ourselves of the kind of king Jesus is. Not a king who demands service from others, but a king who has come to serve. Jesus takes water, pours it into a basin, washes his disciples' feet, and wipes them with a towel. And then he says to his friends – '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.'

Often on Maundy Thursday, as part of our service we reenact this scene, inviting people to come forward to have their feet washed, to remind ourselves of our own calling to follow Jesus in the way of humble service. This year, because of COVID-19, we're unable to gather physically to worship together. Washing has become an even more important part of our daily lives – albeit of hands rather than feet. We all know how important it is for us regularly and thoroughly to wash our hands, for at least 20 seconds at a time, when we come home after time in the outside world. This regular handwashing has itself become a way in which we show our love and service to others, by taking care to reduce the risk of transmitting infection to them. When he was asked which was the greatest commandment, Jesus replied that it was to love God, and to love our neighbours as ourselves. Hand washing isn't purely about looking after ourselves. It's about looking after others too.

We usually wash our own hands! But this evening, instead of washing feet, I'm going to invite Jack and Kate to come here and let me wash their hands. And next time you wash your hands, I invite you for 20 seconds to remember that as you do so, you're loving and serving your neighbour - and at the moment, that's the best way in which you can show the humble service to which Jesus calls us as his followers.