

Just very briefly let's look at three personalities in this washing of the feet.

First Jesus. Having loved his own he loved them to the end.

Until now Jesus has not spoken explicitly of his **love** for the disciples – apart perhaps from his love for the Bethany family in Jn 11 – but now for the next 5 chapters we hear the word love used 31 times (only 6 times in the previous 12 chapters) and the disciples, you and me, are tenderly referred to as “**his own**”. It becomes clear that we disciples are the main way the now Risen Lord wants to reach His world. And the foot washing seems to me part of the preparation for that. It says “having loved his own, he loved them to the end”. Now **end** there can mean right to the finish or perfectly.

So what does he do. Well we know he **washes the disciples feet**. But he does this during the meal – not beforehand as a servant would do as a usual act of courtesy. So Jesus intentionally undertakes this, associating himself with slave-like work – and there's no parallel for this in ancient literature – no parallel of a person of superior status voluntarily washing the feet of someone of inferior status. Jesus act thus represents an assault on the usual social hierarchies, a subversion of the normal categories of shame and honour ...this is God at our feet.

Second Peter – who's pretty clear this is outrageous behaviour and tells Jesus he **will not** have him washing his feet. Some forms of humility are the deepest arrogance. Jesus replies “If I do not wash your feet you will have no part of me”. Which I take to mean, “**If I can't forgive your sins, you can't have my presence**”. If we think we are too unworthy or humble to receive Jesus' grace, we are in danger of missing it. We can never earn this washing, this cleansing but here it is. And it's once for all.

Peter typically overreacts and says ok, not just my feet but my whole body and Jesus responds by saying “one who has bathed has no need to wash, except for the feet” but is entirely clean”. You are **clean** Peter...Peter will need to appropriate that message frequently indeed it's something we should be saying to ourselves in our relation to Jesus. You are clean – it is one way we can honour Jesus' will for us and his work on us, and so keep appropriating his Good News.

We too quickly forget all this when we hear later in Jn 13 “a new commandment I give unto you that you love one another. As I have loved you so you should love one another”. The emphasis here initially must be on as I have loved you, as I have loved you - which is why Jesus begins by washing the disciples feet – not by rewarding them with foot washing once they prove their worth.... **Only the person who has been loved can love**, and only the person who has been loved by Jesus can love like Jesus. It took Peter some time to get to that, but get to that he finally did, in Christ.

Third, Judas, because he has his feet washed too, Jesus giving himself away to the one who gives him away. When Jesus dipped a morsel of bread into the bowl and gave it to Judas it revealed not only **who Judas was** but who Jesus was too – the one who feeds his enemies – who treats his enemies as friends – to the end. Judas **is indispensable** for our understanding of footwashing, of Communion. His presence at the last supper is our lasting reminder that this is not a meal only for the good, the right and the faithful among us, but also for the double-crossers, the spies, the imposters and the two-faced. Judas is included until he excludes himself, until, as John tells us, it is night – inside of him and outside of him, as dark as dark can be.

And there are times when we are like Judas, periods in our lives when we **exclude ourselves**, because we feel betrayed, let down or lost in this world of powers, principalities, pandemics and plague. Well what might enable us to cling to the table might be an awareness that Jesus' faithfulness towards us, his regard for us, his promise for us ... even in the midst of such doubt and disaffection.

We often use that term love and we need in a week like this to think seriously and unsentimentally about what it is to love. When Jesus washes his disciples feet, When Jesus says those words on Maundy Thursday, **"this is my body, broken for you"** he is speaking lovingly to the disciples, to Peter and to Judas, and to every Christian ever since. Jesus seems to be effectively saying, at **every Maundy Thursday, at every Holy Communion, here it is again**, my body broken for you, my washing of your feet. It is as if he is saying I would do it all again in a heartbeat. I am doing it again, day after day, year after year, this is my body, broken for you...remember this. Jesus speaks as a lover speaks. Isn't this just what each of us hopes to hear from our beloved and say to our beloved, when death is near; **"knowing everything I know now, I would do it all over again, for you"**. Which is why this evening is so heart-breaking.