

Maundy Thursday – Readings John 12:1-8 and John 13 1-15

First – John 12:1-8

This year, my mind turns to two evening meals, both characterized by love.

The first is the gathering at the home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha. Lazarus is a local sensation having been dead and raised to life by Jesus and Jesus is the guest of honour.

We find Mary and Martha in character; they are responding to Jesus in the way that comes naturally to them. Martha is serving the meal...she is clearly the practical one who loves by serving.

Mary's response is different. She takes the expensive perfume and anoints Jesus feet, wiping his feet with her hair. Her love is expressed much more intimately.



I've always loved this illustration from the Good News bible of the scene. The simplicity of the lines in the drawing remind me of the purity of Mary's love and devotion. What instinct drove her to this? What did she know that the others didn't?

I've been thinking too about the quantity of the perfume – nard is a perfumed oil. When we started washing our hands more frequently and for much longer Katherine bought a couple of bottles of hand cream that soothes and protects. I struggled to get the top open and then when I did the stuff came blobbing out. I ended up with far far too much on my hands. There must be something wrong with the design because Helen has just come to me with the same problem.



I tried to rub it in but it was hopeless in the end had to wipe most of it off.

Mary poured out a pint of perfumed oil. It will have got everywhere...I'm not sure how Jesus would have been able to stand up he would be slipping about all over the place.

Yet Mary's generosity is itself a sign of a great love being outpoured...it's a sign of God's kingdom, abundant and generous.

The Gospel writer is keen to tell us that Judas had a very different view of it all but a thought occurred to me...did this incident give Jesus the idea he was to use at the last Supper?

I don't believe Jesus knew everything he was going to say and do no more than any of us do; he could be guided by the Spirit and influenced by what was happening just as we can.

Let's hear the second reading.

(second reading)

On the night he was betrayed Jesus came to supper with his friends. Not just any supper, this was Passover when the food for the supper helped tell the story of the Israelites rescue from slavery in Egypt. This was the occasion Jesus instituted communion taking bread and wine and teaching his disciples a new way of remembering – although what is was they were going to remember had not yet happened.

Before all that, he took off his outer clothes and girded like a servant he washes the disciples feet.

In the same way Mary showed her love to Jesus, Jesus is showing his love to the disciples and teaching them and us a lesson. Show your love for me by service to one another. Embrace humility.

I have taken services where foot-washing took place – you may have been to them. It was always awkward and embarrassing simply because the whole exercise was so alien to us – whereas in Jesus day it was a normal activity. The point is NOT that a foot got washed, but that we learn the lesson of humility and service in a very practical way of fulfilling Jesus command which follows in the same chapter. Love each other. A new commandment I give to you, Love each other.

Our present situation gives us ample opportunity to do something as normal as footwashing was for Jesus. Shopping. Delivering. Supporting with food and money. Talking on the phone and caring for each other in all these simple ways.

One of the wonderful things to emerge in the current situation is the outpouring of support, offers of help and acts of service to each other. My neighbours use the Whatsapp group to advise they are going to Waitrose, or have a shop booked or have surplus or can assist with a need. The church has risen to the challenge with the pastoral team being phone buddies or shopping angels and the various agencies have grouped together to create a hub through which help can be given. Thank you everyone for what you are doing...you are living out Jesus teaching.

Graham Kendrick captures the mood of Jesus teaching in his song "All the room was hushed and still" and I shall play that shortly and I invite you to join in – if only to drown out my singing.

In the lyrics is this line...

And whatever comes
Love each other, in the way that I have loved you.

For the disciples what was about to come was Jesus betrayal, arrest and crucifixion. These are the things he wants them to remember in the communion service; his willingness to be the suffering servant and give his life that we might live.

On this Maundy Thursday, we wont be in church but many of us will be on the street at 8:00pm showing our support for the NHS. Their loving service is astonishing.

Let's gives thanks in prayer.

Loving Lord Jesus you taught us that the highest achievement we can have is to be the servant of others. That the most exalted position in your kingdom is to be on our knees. We thank you for those serving us and we pray your blessing, your strength, your wisdom and your grace to be upon all who serve in the NHS.

We thank you for our church community and pastoral team. For Roz and Terry and all those who coordinate and organise. We thank you for Amanda and Michelle and Lucy and all those who quietly serve and ensure the church runs as it should.

Lord grant us your joy in loving and serving others...your instinct to offer ourselves as you son gave himself for us.

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

Had we been gathering in church we would have had a simple communion service. On this occasion and to close this video I will read you the poem Breadsong – by Gerard Kelly.

The image is my home communion kit.

BREADSONG

*It's not in the bread
but in the breaking
that the mystery of God's story is told.
It's not in the seed
but in the dying,
not in the treasure
but in the digging for it.
It's not in the mountain
but in its moving.*

*It's not in the wine
but in the pouring out
that a new world is purchased
for the weary.*

*It's not in the cross
but in the crucified,
not in the nails
but in the nailing.
It's not in the grave
but in the rising from it.*

*It's in the giving
that the gift becomes life;
it's in the living
that the Word becomes flesh.*

*It's in this taking,
this receiving,
this sharing of a supper,
this pointing to a future
that is promised
and paid for
and pressed into our hands;
it's in this everyday mealtime miracle
that the universe is born
to new life.*

