

It is Passover. The head of all the important festivals that the Jewish people celebrate. Passover celebrates the birthday of Israel as a nation on the exodus from Egypt. It is celebrating life and freedom, freedom of the spirit.

And yet, they are in captivity. Ruled by the Romans. Living in fear and waiting for the conquering King to rescue them.

Jesus had had a busy week. He had been welcomed in to Jerusalem as the Messiah. With crowds waving palms and ecstatic that the prophecy was being fulfilled. They cried out 'hosanna' which means save.

But the week had not continued in this happy, joyful way.

The next day he had cleared the Temple. Furious at the hypocrisy and lack of respect. The following day, in the Temple, he is challenged by the chief priests and elders, whom he confronts. He teaches all who will listen. And we think he was anointed by Mary with expensive perfume one evening of this week.

For the disciples it had become very confusing even though Jesus had explained many times that he must die.

Yet here they are for the Passover supper.

In a dark upper room. Oil lamps are flickering.

There is the smell of food. Fresh baked bread, roast lamb, herbs and rough country wine.

The disciples had travelled on dusty or, if it had rained, very muddy roads. Normally a slave would be there ready to wash the feet of guests. But no slave was available and the disciples were probably too busy arguing about the best seats in the kingdom than to notice such a lowly task needed doing.

Let's just look back at the first verse of this chapter;

From the passion translation 'All throughout his time with his disciples, Jesus had demonstrated a deep and tender love for them. And now he longed to show them the full measure of his love.'

The mouth watering smell of cooked meat and warm bread was filling the room as it was being served.

With calmness and majesty, in silence, Jesus stood up, removed his outer robe, his belt and probably his inner tunic - leaving him clothed like a slave - put a towel round his waist, took the pitcher, poured water in to the basin. And knelt to wash the feet of his disciples, one by one. Washing the dirt off the feet of sinful men.

This is Jesus the Son of God. He is God. Glorious God of the universe come to earth, kneeling on the ground washing the feet of sinful men. This is indescribable humility. And incomprehensible love.

This washing of the feet is a good illustration of our need to admit to, and own up to our mistakes. We walk through the world and get (metaphorical)dirty feet. When we confess our sins we are assured in scripture many times that, 'He is faithful and will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' Our relationship with God is clear and open.

Not full of the boulders and obstacles of our mistakes and unconfessed sin. It's about keeping a short account with him.

It may be helpful to close our eyes now and imagine being in that dark upper room.

With the wonderful fragrance of food and wine. Of the oil lamps.

We can hear the rustle of Jesus removing his outer clothes. The pouring of the water into the basin.

And then see him, kneeling at our feet. Our dirty smelly feet. Looking up at us with such tender love and kindness. And then gently and thoroughly washing us clean.

He is kneeling . The roles should be reversed. We should be kneeling at his feet. Thankful and overwhelmed by his extravagant love. His servant attitude. His sacrifice.

But this is what he is calling us to do; He calls us to do as he has done.

To push away the world's view of dignity and self importance ...'we are worth it' mantra.

But to witness to others how awesome our God is by lovingly serving- doing the menial and humiliating tasks for the glory of Jesus Christ. We draw closer to God when we serve others.

What is it we need to do?

I have thought long and hard about this. I think it means doing what needs to be done, it may be caring for a loved one, and their personal needs, clearing up messes, brushing some ones hair, cleaning a toilet, washing a pan. Or it may be doing an extra journey, listening to the story you have heard many times before. It could be tying a shoelace for someone, sitting with a person in need. Anything and everything, as long as it is done in and with love, with no resentment or bitterness or pride.

And I am immediately reminded of Brother Lawrence in 17th century; who trained himself to do everything for the love of God. Conversing and praying simply all the time in all that he did. To do small things for the love of God as he couldn't do the great things, he said. He was practicing the presence of God.

Do you want to draw closer to God? I do. And I hope this vision of Jesus washing your feet and cleaning up the mess helps you to want to serve others in any way needed.

Just like he does for you. Without any concern as to what it looks like to others or if it is even noticed by anyone. God sees everything and he sees our mistakes and the opportunities we miss. And he sees when you honour him by caring for others in any way, however small. And by doing so we draw closer to God.

Verse 17 ' Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.'

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