

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Reflection – Maundy Thursday – 1st April 2021

Canon David Pickering

Then if I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. I have set you an example: you are to do as I have done for you.

It is beyond the realms of Zoom liturgical practice to follow the call of Jesus to physically wash each other's feet this evening. But, this evening, we have included some words of a foot washing anthem as they may convey the deeper meaning better than the action itself.

My feet have always been important to me: I was a keen footballer from early teens until my mid-fifties and one of the joys of living in the South of France is the opportunity for walking. Perhaps I may even have something of an obsession about my feet! Every day I carry a pedometer in my pocket. Fitness experts recommend ten thousand steps a day, but I hope those of us of more advanced years might get away with five to seven thousand.

Yet these few thousand steps a day are as nothing compared with those required every day by most people in the ancient world. After walking along dusty roads and fields in sandals or bare feet, foot washing would be an absolute necessity. This menial task would be carried out by 'inferiors' for 'superiors', generally by slaves (often women), by children for parents, wives for husbands, and students for their teachers: never a teacher for his pupils. That Jesus does the reverse adds deeper meaning to his action.

For Jesus, the washing of the disciples' feet is doubly-symbolic. It is an act of the loving service he requires of us: ***I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.*** And this action is one which brings unity. No longer will servants wash masters' feet. As we "wash" each other's feet, and serve one another, even, or especially, serving the "least" among us, this becomes a unifying love, one where power and rank no longer hold sway.

As we move through the climax of Holy Week and Easter we celebrate God's love for us shown in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The cross is the greatest act of love, shown triumphantly in the risen Christ. And this we celebrate in the Eucharist, as St Paul expresses in this evening's New Testament reading: ***For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.***

In this passage from 1 Corinthians 11. 23 - 26, St. Paul gives the earliest written account of the institution of the Eucharist: he was writing some decades before the gospels. As he says, in the Eucharist we proclaim the saving acts of Jesus. This is not a simple commemoration like a birthday or an anniversary, but an active celebration of his saving love. From earliest times the Eucharist has also been called *agape* - a "Love Feast". Here we celebrate our salvation through God's love for us as shown in the death and resurrection of Jesus. At the end of that feast, that celebration, God calls us to go out into the world, sharing that love in all our daily dealings, both with those close to us and those who are afar.

In the words of our Foot Washing anthem:

God is love, and where true love is, God himself is there.

Amen