

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

**WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Sermon – Maundy Thursday**

**14<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

**All Saints' Marseille – Aix-en-Provence**

*The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Curate*

The stillness of the night has prevailed over the clamour of the city. In the quiet upper room, in this his urgent hour, Jesus gets up from the table, picks up a pail of water and fills a basin, takes a rough cleaning cloth, kneels down in front of the friends who will deny, betray and abandon him and begins to wash their feet.

When Jesus approaches Peter, he resists and protests. 'Lord, you will never wash my feet!' This is a task usually performed by someone who has no other place than to serve and to do menial tasks. Jesus washing Peter's feet would turn the world upside down. 'The Wisdom of God that can restrain the untamed fury of the waters and keep back the seas, now pours water into a basin; and the Master washes the feet of his servants.' (*Byzantine liturgy*)

I guess there that Peter has much more on his mind than only resisting this unheard-of role reversal. Peter is not willing to show Jesus his feet, to have him touch them. Yet Peter, one of those whom Jesus has first called to follow him, is a loyal, staunch and generous disciple. He is ready to make impassioned declarations: 'I will follow you wherever you go.' He is ready to plunge into water to join Jesus. Later, this night, he will draw his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant, in an attempt to defend his Master. Yet he wouldn't readily have his feet washed.

We can so well recognise ourselves in Peter, with our fear that the hidden imperfections of our lives might be exposed, and that such exposure would leave us unloved and even rejected.

It is difficult to believe in the love of others, to consent to it. Letting oneself be loved is to accept to be vulnerable. It means being willing to accept our bruises, wounds, and scars to be seen and touched. It is so much easier to care for others generously and to love them, than to allow oneself to be cared for. All those who have ever been cared for in a

hospital bed know how much this depending on others for the simplest thing is a lesson in vulnerability and humility.

Of course, we can be generous, we can do things for others, we can even overwhelm and embarrass them with our generosity. And rejoice in our righteousness. Nonetheless, the experience of being loved is crucial. 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' If we do not allow ourselves to be loved, we cannot enter into the mystery of God's gracious and generous giving himself for us. Only those who know they are loved and who allow themselves to be loved, can make, in return, the gift of their lives.

Jesus Christ knows where our feet have walked, the journey they have been on, where the bruises and calluses of life have come from. To allow him to minister to us means coming before him with an open heart, knowing our limitations and failures. To allow him to cleanse our feet is to have our insecurities, weariness and bitterness scrubbed away. It is to know that our brokenness is not the final word. God can redeem what is most unlovely in us. 'Love to the loveless shown, that they might lovely be.' (Samuel Crossman, *My song is love unknown*).

In Jesus Christ, God kneels down and asks permission to love us, to serve us, to save us. He reveals our dignity by putting himself lower than we are.

Jesus Christ's love is so deep and so true that he 'empties himself, taking the form of a slave' (Philippians 2.7). He gives up his life to free us to be a part of God's inheritance. We are fully known, fully accepted, fully forgiven, fully loved.

Are we prepared and willing to be touched by this kind of love, that can give us new life? Are we prepared and willing to proclaim the liberating news that God freely loves us at all times and that we are made for communion with him and for eternal life?

Jesus Christ gives himself tonight in the sacrament – tomorrow on the cross. The washing of the feet, the shared cup and bread, the cross – one commandment of love, one testimony that where true love is, God himself is there.

Amen.