

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Maundy Thursday – 28th March 2024

All Saints' Marseille

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The hour has come.

Jesus kneels before each disciple. One by one, the water of his love washes over their feet. No one is left out. Judas, who will betray him. Peter, who will deny ever having known him. Thomas, who will seek evidence of Christ's Resurrection. Those who have disputed who is the greatest among them. Those who will remain silent. All are washed. All are loved.

“Do you understand what I have done to you?” asks Jesus.

At first glance, the answer to the question seems clear. The disciples surely know what Jesus has done: he has washed their feet. Yet, like Peter, they might have felt uneasy. This has challenged their cultural protocol: it was customary for a servant to wash the guests' feet upon entering the house, a gesture of hospitality relegated to the lowest rank. How could their Teacher and Lord stoop to such a humble task?

Christ's words are precious and rich, but tonight, his gestures also have their eloquence. “Do you understand what I have done to you?” he asks. With the towel and basin in hand, Jesus reshapes his disciples' perception of power and authority. He turns the realities of their world upside down. He allows God's love to flow freely. He inaugurates the pivotal role of humble, selfless love and service in the communities that will gather around his name after his crucifixion and resurrection.

But tonight, Christ holds before us also the choice of vulnerability and love. It is a choice that cuts to the core of our being, more challenging and real than many of us are comfortable with. “You will never wash my feet,” Peter protests,

recoiling from the vulnerability of having his feet touched and washed by Christ. He feels exposed, he feels uncertain. He is reluctant to confront the hidden parts of himself. Just like Peter, we may have parts of our lives that we have exiled; memories we'd rather not acknowledge, afraid as we are to confront our own helplessness and vulnerability amidst life's chaos.

Yet there can be no appropriation of Christ's life, without risking openness, truthfulness, and vulnerability, without revealing ourselves both at our best and at our worst, in the image of the crucified Lord. By daring to allow Christ to serve us, we begin our transformation into his likeness. "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me," Christ declares. We are to remove our shoes and socks, place our feet, our life, our vulnerable self into the hands of Christ – and be washed. This choice extends beyond this evening's ritual; it's a daily commitment, not confined to the liturgy but enacted in the world. Once cleansed, we are prepared to hear Christ's new commandment: "Love one another." Just one commandment. One simple, straightforward commandment, Jesus' deepest desire for his followers.

Can we truly be commanded to love? Does love adhere to decrees? Jesus doesn't merely instruct us to feign love. Instead, he says, "Love as I have loved you." Authentic, sincere, generous love - becoming vulnerable to the world's pain, loving not some, but all. That is the choice before us. A hard and costly choice. Is Jesus asking for the impossible? Perhaps.

Yet, following the commandment, there comes a promise, or perhaps an incentive, or even a warning: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Love thus become the litmus test of our witness in the world. It is through our love for one another that the world knows our identity and our allegiance. Our love is the tangible manifestation of Jesus Christ in the world. It's through our love that we "become a place where God happens for someone else," says Rowan Williams. Just imagine what the world could look like if we cultivated this "impossible" love - God's gift to a broken world.

Many view Jesus merely as a role model, and then despair when they fall short of his 'high standards'. But Jesus' love is not merely an example to emulate. It is the source from which our love flows. It is the origin and sustenance of our love, where it finds its depth and renewal. Jesus doesn't command us to exhaust ourselves by trying to conjure up love from our own limited and easily drained reservoirs. Instead, he invites us to abide in his boundless love – the most

abundant and inexhaustible source of all. The love we could give the world is not our own. It is God's, and God, the source, knows no bounds, no end.

Tonight, we enter the three sacred days that lead us to the core of our faith - to the words and actions of Jesus, which not only inspire us, but also give shape to our lives. We will be shaped and moulded by our service of the world, our love for one another, our communion with Christ's death and resurrection in the Eucharist.

The hour has come. "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." The hour has come. The hour the world has been waiting for. Now begins the great mystery of everlasting life. And this is the very journey that Jesus Christ begins tonight.

Amen.