

# **CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT**

## **Maundy Thursday 2020, Footwashing**

### **Welcome**

One of the special aspects of Maundy Thursday is the washing of feet that, in many churches, accompanies the celebration of Holy Communion. This year, of course, this is not possible. But why do we wash one another's feet? Where does this come from and what does it signify?

Below we read the account in John's Gospel of how Jesus washed His disciples' feet, an act of humility and service. George reflects on this, its connection with Holy Communion and the opportunities we have for loving service.

### **Scripture Passage**

*John 13:1-17, 31-35*

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself.

Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."

Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”

Jesus said to him, “One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.”

For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord -- and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.

“For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.”

Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

## **Reflection**

Did you notice what St John *doesn't* say about the Last Supper? He makes no mention of the bread and wine of Holy Communion. He sees no need to repeat what the other three Gospel writers have said about that. Instead, he wants to give us another perspective.

Matthew, Mark and Luke make a close connection between the bread and wine of the Last Supper and the Crucifixion next day. Christ dies on the Cross, his body “broken” as the bread was broken. His blood is shed in a sacrifice of himself that confirms, in the traditional way of the ancient world,

the new covenant described in Jeremiah 31.31. It resembles the blood smeared by the Israelites on the lintels of their doors at the Passover (Exodus 12), when they were freed from slavery in Egypt. Only now it is all mankind that is freed from slavery to sin.

John sees the bread and wine of Holy Communion in a different light. Chapter 6 of his Gospel records Jesus describing his flesh and blood as nourishment. God gave the Israelites manna in the wilderness to sustain their earthly life. Now in Jesus he is giving himself as the bread of eternal life. Jesus says that to have eternal life we must eat his flesh and drink his blood. The reaction at the time was incomprehension, shock and horror. Blood was considered to be the source of life, a gift from God, sacred. To drink it was a complete no-no. But, as we know, Jesus was speaking spiritually. The flesh and blood would be eaten and drunk through the tokens of bread and wine. They would become his life in us.

Christ's life in us is eternal life, the life of heaven, a life of unconditional love for all around us. It is what enables us to obey his command that we should love each other "as I have loved you". Actions speak louder than words, so to show what that might mean, St John describes Jesus washing the disciples' feet. It was normally the duty of a slave, if you had one. It shows us what Jesus was like, and so gives us an insight into what God is like and how great is God's love for us.

This Easter, for the first time, our churches will be locked and we will be unable to meet there, or anywhere else, to receive the sacrament of Holy Communion and sing the Easter hymns together. It is a great sadness. But it is not so different from what Christians in many countries have long been suffering through persecution or warfare. We are still the Church. The virus gives us new opportunities for serving one another in love. And, like St Paul, we know that nothing, but nothing (and certainly not Covid-19), can ever separate us from God's love of each and all of us.

*George*

## **Points for Prayers**

- To find opportunities for loving service in these times when churches are locked.
- Our own need both to forgive and be forgiven.
- Thanksgiving for care, skill and courage of NHS workers.
- Need for further largescale testing.
- Prime Minister's health and for government.
- Funerals needing to take place under new restrictions with only family mourners.

Growing as a worshipper, a servant and a family

We pray that 'we might live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us' (Ephesians 5:2)