

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor  
Maundy Thursday, 24 March 2016  
Revd Dr Colin Dundon

## **THE FOOT WASHING**

### **JOHN 13.1-11**

## **MAUNDY THURSDAY**

### **Introduction**

And so the time has come. And Jesus performs an act of holy intimacy; the washing of feet.

Holy intimacy? Feet are very basic parts of the body. They are not beautiful and they are not ugly but they are basic: down to earth. Washing feet is a daily mundane domestic task.

Intimacy and down-to-earthness come through in this passage. It is a beginning and an end. It is the beginning of the last long night before his crucifixion. It is the end of everything that he has done so far.

“Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”

And so we begin our intimate journey of love to the cross and resurrection.

### **It is Passover**

That is the first key marker. Passover is about to begin. The beautiful celebration of life and liberation dominates hearts and minds. God acted in human history against the greatest in those ancient days, Pharaoh of Egypt and set his people free. It was God's victory not theirs. They were a bunch of slaves, no more than a disorganized,

cranky rabble. But God set his love on them and set them free. And at this celebration they longed to be free again.

Passover has already figured in this Gospel. Jesus is the Passover Lamb (1.29, 36). He fed the crowds at Passover time.

### **Jesus time has come**

Jesus has been conscious of the dawning moment. A couple of weeks ago we reflected on the Martha's footwashing of Jesus in Bethany. We saw how deeply tied in that was to his death and burial.

In the chapters 13-17 Jesus explores this time; leaving the world, going to the father, the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus does not die and go to heaven. Jesus is raised from the dead. Something brand new was to happen. He had to meet his disciples first then as risen Lord go to the father; all entirely different from our ideas of dying and going to heaven.

Die he must for the world. Rise he must for the world. Meet the disciples he must for the world. Go to the father he must for the world.

It is that time.

### **Now Jesus demonstrates his love**

Jesus loved his own not only till the end of his life but till the end; to the uttermost into the very presence of the father through death.

Remember the good shepherd of chapter 10. The shepherd loves the shepp enough to lay down his life for them. Now he shows that by showing them there is nothing he would not do for them. He would take them with him to the end, to the father.

What love.

## **And yet evil betrays love**

The devil had already made up his mind that Judas would betray him. In other words, it was time for violent power to strike. This is not a romantic scene. This love is contested. The scene may appear almost domestic but beneath that mundane trapping lurks a battle for the hearts of men and women; to be incorporated into a love that goes to the end, to the father or to be a betrayer of that love in violence and deceit.

The mundane scene becomes a place of cosmic struggle played out among and in disciples.

## **Not with angels and fearsome might but with a towel and water 3-5**

The story teller takes us inside the mind of Jesus. Unlike the mind of the devil that we have just read Jesus knows that everything he has is from God, all things are in his hands and soon he will take his rightful place with the father. Now is the time to show the disciple what he has always been about.

And he is about a towel and water and washing feet.

There are two pictures of power here. One is the evil one and his is the power to betray and create chaos and violence. He will use any willing agent to do so. In this case most all to destroy Jesus in death.

The other picture of power is the power of love to use all power for the good of others, regarding them as better than oneself, putting their interests first. This is the son being the servant voluntarily showing where God's power is truly found and exercised.

This is what he had to do precisely because he has come from God and is going to God: Because this is God. The footwashing and the

crucifixion to which it points is Jesus' way of displaying who God always was and is now.

The days before Easter this year in Brussels have presented us with the stark realities this intimate scene unveils: servant humility issuing in love for the world or violence and betrayal that destroys the world. And remember Judas is a disciple. He is not out there but in here among us.

### **Peter reacts badly**

Peter shows that he has no grasp on Jesus' motivation for performing this action. Without doubt the action is alarming and confronting in its implications. Peter wants nothing to do with it.

So the room now has more tension in it. The tension is heightened when Jesus warns Peter what is at stake; having a part in Jesus, what Jesus has spoken of as abiding in him. Rejecting the action has dire consequences. The footwashing is to participate in the death of Jesus, to participate in the love of God that drives Jesus to the cross for the love of the world. To refuse it is to refuse God's love for the world.

Peter wants Jesus in his own image. But Jesus will not let Peter go; he will not abandon him to his delusions. He loves Peter but he calls him to account. There is more to be played out in this story in the crucifixion and resurrection but that is for another time.

It is not the footwashing that makes the disciples clean. One of them is not clean. The betrayer, the bringer of violence still lurks among them. Being clean is participating in Jesus' love for the world that leads to crucifixion. We die with him.

### **Conclusion**

The footwashing uncovers truths about the disciples; some are given over to betrayal and violence, some given over to illusions about Jesus and what God has sent him to do.

But mostly it is a self-revelation about Jesus. He is God's love for the world about to be slaughtered on a cross for that love. This is not an abstraction but relational and intimate. Disciples are disciples because they participate in Jesus. Footwashing does not make us clean. Participating in Jesus does.

So tonight is one of challenge; participating Jesus all the way to the cross so we may share in his life, the light of the world.