

Reflection and Talk for Maundy Thursday
the History, the Humility, the Heart and the Hope
.....There is the 'history'....

Passover is the annual Jewish Festival commemorating the saving events of the Exodus from Egypt. It may already have existed, as the institution in pre-Israelite Canaan of an agricultural festival, which was absorbed into the life and ritual of the incoming Hebrews. From the time of Solomon, the Passover ritual was established and there were to be regular festivals in Jerusalem. Every family sacrificed a lamb to eat at Passover. It was a reminder of the first such sacrifice, which took place just before God rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. On that occasion, God 'passed over' the Israelite houses, where the blood of the lamb had been sprinkled on the door-posts and lintel and he spared the lives of their firstborn, but destroyed their Egyptian contemporaries. Unleavened bread made quickly, without yeast, was a reminder of the hurried preparations made when Pharaoh finally, after many diseases and pestilences, let the Israelites go, from their slavery. It also recalled the first bread baked from new corn, four days after the Israelites entered Canaan.

At the great gathering of this significant Passover Festival, people continue to both look both back and also forward to the coming of the kingdom of God.



The Last Supper, which we commemorate on Maundy Thursday, was a reminder of this story. Jesus was to be 'the Lamb of God'. Jesus's own blood would be sprinkled on the doors of people's hearts who believed in and followed him. Through confessing their sins, the price would be paid and their sins would be 'passed over' by the redeeming love of God.



The bread would represent the body of Jesus broken and shared and the wine, his blood poured out, but not only for Jews, rather, for everyone. The true Lamb of God would bring the final release from the slavery of sin. The Passover Meal started with a Blessing and then the bread was passed round to the guests.

At the Last Supper, the bread was blessed and the bread broken and wine poured out symbolically for the ultimate blessing of what was to happen on Good Friday. We do this, as Jesus commanded us to continue, 'in remembrance of Him' when we share Holy Communion (Luke 22: 19).....



There is the 'history' and

there is the 'humility'. Read the Maundy Thursday Reflection from the Holy Week and Easter Booklet we've distributed. Part of this says:

Maundy Thursday

Readings: Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14
Corinthians 11:23-26, John 13:1-17, 31b-35

A lot of people are squeamish about revealing their feet, especially having them touched! But in Jesus' day the custom was very different. Feet, covered only in sandals, would quickly become covered in dust - and worse, as chamber pots would be tipped into the streets and animals would leave their droppings on the roads. On arrival at a house, a servant would remove the footwear and wash the feet as a practical necessity and sign of hospitality, performed on behalf of the host. It was a menial task, so although the act of foot washing was common, for the master to do it - in the middle of a meal - was unheard of. It was customary for diners to wash their hands between courses, so a bowl of water and a towel would have been available at the table.⁶



The voice of Peter

"We arrived for the meal, and everyone was relaxed and relieved to have a chance to rest, but Jesus was strangely anxious. We settled at the table and everyone began to eat and discuss the events of the day, when Jesus suddenly rose and took off his robe. The chat died down and we watched in silence as he picked up a basin of clean water, tied a towel about him, knelt and began washing our feet. We'd already been cleaned by the servant, so I quickly glanced at my feet to check for dirt... nothing. Jesus worked his way round to me. I couldn't let him do this! - so I argued, but he insisted. Looked me right in the eye he did, and said 'Unless I wash you, you have no part of me'. So I told him to do my hands and my head, too! I want to be totally washed by him, because I don't want to miss out on anything... although I wasn't sure exactly what he was doing at first. This man is always turning everything upside down... just when we think we understand, he comes up with a new way to throw us off course, to teach us something new... he's always right. Always."



Allowing ourselves to feel vulnerable goes against the grain. It can bring feelings of shame, guilt, and whole host of other discomforts. But Jesus uses our feelings to reach us when he needs to convey a message of importance; in this passage he teaches the disciples, and us, that no one is too great to serve, or too proud to receive.

◆ Infinite, intimate God; this night you kneel before your friends and wash our feet. Bound together in your love, trembling, we drink your cup and watch.⁷

⁶ Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible: Zondervan (2019) John 12:5.

⁷ The New Zealand Prayer Book, in Angela Ashwin (ed), The Book of a Thousand Prayers: Zondervan (1996), p.336

So, footwashing was a menial task, habitually performed by a servant to make a guest comfortable. It was about welcome and hospitality. Jesus took this further. As the Servant to all, his footwashing also symbolised cleansing within, not just as a bath might do for the outside of the person. Jesus was

demonstrating not only the ultimate sacrifice of humility, but also the ultimate service.

The first two verses of the hymn 'Brother let me be your servant' are:

Brother, sister let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant, too.

We are pilgrims on a journey,
and are brothers on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

'History', 'humility' and there is the 'heart'... As he washed the disciples' feet Jesus would also see the damage to them caused by the dirt caught up from the dusty roads. But Jesus saw beyond the outside, to the dirt and the hurt in their head and their hearts. With his heart of love, Jesus wanted to wash and heal the disciples from all that too. He would do this by the breaking of his own body and the shedding of his blood, being sprinkled over them, as he bore their sins on the cross.

However, just as in the parables Jesus told, there was a hidden challenge. He knew the betrayal which was in Judas Iscariot's heart. He prompts all his disciples to expose the dirt and the hurt inside their hearts and minds. This is our challenge today too.

Jesus can see it, but if we are willing to reveal it Jesus will cleanse us mind, body and spirit, from the harmful behaviours which come from us and which are directed towards us. Together these draw us away from our holy God's purposes and plans for us. Jesus can free us from the hold and the harm, which the slavery of these sins keeps us under; repeatedly triggering things we'd rather forget, or which still hurt us, or others. Perhaps a resentment, a disappointment, a lie, a betrayal, a letting go of a misunderstanding?

Through God's love, Jesus was about to bear the pain of the full resentment of those around him, their disappointment and misunderstanding, as he did not fulfil their expectations of what the Messiah would be. He would be betrayed. They would make him out a liar and clothe him in the cloak not of blessing and

service, but of disbelief and disdain. They would crown him as a fake king with thorns.

The 'history', the 'humility', the 'heart' and there is the 'hope'Jesus would experience and bear on the cross the pain and the dirt of hearts and minds and hands and of people's feet for all time. It would all literally be nailed there, by the piercing of his own hands and of his own feet at Calvary.

In this way, Jesus would demonstrate that we can allow our restored hearts and minds; our healed hands and feet to be used by him and for him. We can be free and we can free others from what holds them down and holds them back too. What a true fulfilment of that historical fleeing from an enslaving Egypt! Through the humility of truly letting go of ourselves, we are redeemed, healed and liberated. We not only become more Christ-like, but we are able to hold the Christ-light for others, in hope for their whole healing too

Emerging from the darkness of lockdown, our challenging question

Can we carry the light of Jesus and be a blessing and service to others, greater than we have ever been before?

Through the **'history', the 'humility' and the love of his 'heart', Jesus is our 'hope'.**

Indeed, **Jesus himself is hoping**, as he prompts us:

"Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them"

Amen.