

Maundy Thursday HC 2008: Exodus 12, John 13.

Things were always that bit different with the Teacher around. He'd take something totally normal, something you'd seen or said or heard or done for years, and just put a bit of a spin on it, open your eyes to something new in it, or rather something that had been there all along, but you'd never seen it before. It was exciting, but sometimes a bit worrying, he turned the whole world upside down, and sometimes he left you standing on your head.

Passover. Well, there's an example if you like. Going into the city to find a man carrying a water jug and saying "The Teacher's ready to celebrate Passover, shew us the room". But we did it, and there was the man with the water jar and he shewed us the room, an upstairs room, nice and quiet and private. It was always so tricky getting quiet time with Jesus, so many people wanted a bit of his time and attention.

So, we got the meal ready, you know, the lamb roasted with its innards in it, and the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs and so on. We were all ready to remember what God had done for his people so long ago. Oh, those were the days, when God's mighty outstretched arm struck down the enemy and saved his people. And for that one Passover night we were there with Israel in the Exodus. Normally we lived under Roman rule, but that night we were set free again.

We were all ready to eat, starving really, the smell of that roast meat. Lovely. And then Jesus took his coat off, put a towel round his waist and started washing our feet.

I could have kicked myself. We'd got all the food ready, but forgot to put out the basins and handtowels. I thought he was shewing us what we'd forgotten. First I thought it was a joke, but Jesus wasn't laughing. Then I thought - I ought to wash his feet. I mean I'm always the one from our group who stands up for what is right, I'm the one who says things, just come out with what we're all thinking. So I said "Are you going to wash my feet, Lord?" I thought he'd say "well done, Peter, you've worked it out, you ought to wash my feet" Only he said "you don't know what I'm up to, but you'll get it in the end", and picked up my foot.

Well, I wasn't having any of that. It made me look stupid, having the Master wash my feet, as if I couldn't keep myself clean. I mean, what would you feel like if the Messiah, if the chosen one of God, if the only man who could really call God his Father, came and washed your feet. Humiliating really, isn't it. I mean, with your shoes off everyone could see the darns in your socks and the state of your nails. It's just not nice to have to shew people where you're in a mess. It's not nice to shew God where you're in a mess. And it makes you look so stupid, as if you can't keep yourself clean, can't keep yourself out of a mess, can't stop mucking up your life and everyone else's, can't stop sinning even for five minutes.

So I said, "No, I'll clean myself up, then I'll be good enough to go about with you. I'll not have you washing my filth away". I thought he'd say "well done Peter, you've worked it out. You need to put yourself right with God before you can sit down at his special banquet".

But he didn't, he just said "Unless I wash you, you have no share in me". Well, that did it. The one thing I really wanted was to be with him, well, I guess really I wanted to be like him, sort of to be him. You see, I was always trying to be the leader, the one who made suave and witty comments, the one everyone would look up to. But I kept putting my foot in it. Whereas Jesus, well, he always said just the right thing, everyone wanted to hear him, everyone wanted to follow him.

I hero worshipped him, and now he was asking me to shew how much I loved him. Of course the thing to do was to make the big gesture. "Don't just wash my feet, Lord, wash all of me, make me all like you."

I thought he'd say "well done, Peter. You've worked it out. You need to do something really big to convince me you love me".

But he didn't. He said "you've been cleansed, all you need to do is get rid of today's dirt off your feet". And I thought of everything he'd said and done over the past three years, and how I'd changed. How he'd opened my eyes to what it meant to love God with every fibre of my being, and to want to shew his love for me and my love for him to everyone I met. Doing little kindnesses - not to look good, not trying to buy my way into heaven, not even trying to make other people happy, but just trying to be like God, the one who gives us everything.

And I knew I was clean really, but I kept putting my foot in it. I just needed today's failures washed away, and I always would do, every day. So I let him wash my feet.

And he said "you've seen me do it, now you go and do it. Just like I did it. Do it as God's love and with God's love. Do it in a superhuman way, do it like me and for me, so everyone will know you're not good people, but you are my people, my disciples, my beloved and precious friends. It's only when you love with my love that you will change the world, and be changed yourself."

The LORD said to his redeemed people: This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance. And when your children ask you "what do you mean by this observance" you shall say "by this shall everyone know that we are Jesus' disciples".

In the power of the Spirit and in union with Christ, we make our prayers to our heavenly Father.

Almighty God, you brought freedom from slavery to all who would follow you. Have mercy on our world, where men, women and children are still in bondage to illness, poverty, and discrimination. Change the hearts of all who oppress their neighbours, bring freedom to all who are overwhelmed by bondage.

Lord, in your mercy...**Hear our prayer**

Almighty God, your Son said that by our love all would know that we were his disciples. Enlarge our hearts to love as you love, to live as Jesus lived, to reveal you to those around you. We ask you to inspire all who lead and teach in your world-wide church, and pray especially for our Archbishops, Bishops, and the ministers in this diocese.

Lord...

Almighty God, your Son revealed his friends' deepest needs, and ministered to them. Bring your enlivening touch to all who are troubled and burdened. Bring comfort and strength to all who are overwhelmed by worries about money, family, job security and all those things which torture the mind.

Lord...

Almighty God, your Son brought healing and restoration to all whom he touched. Inspire and guide all who care for the sick, so that their hands will do the work of Christ. Bring your healing to all who suffer in body, mind or spirit, especially...

Lord...

Almighty God, tonight to ask us to remember your mighty deeds and live in them. We ask you to remember those who have died, and bring them to live with you, especially...

With the church through every age and land, we join our prayers with Jesus' as he intercedes before your throne. Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.