

## **MAUNDY THURSDAY 2020 Rev Robyn Boyd**

This is a night when the drama of the liturgy speaks more than words. home, follow the liturgy sent with this sermon. (The liturgy from the Diocesan Holy Week At Home, sent to you earlier this week, is shorter and without the ritual elements of Maundy Thursday, like foot washing )

**Let's remember those elements.**

### **Feet being washed**

*(If you are with another person wash each other's feet; if you are alone, wash your own feet, imagining that you are also washing someone else's feet)*

*We wash each other's feet – a symbolic action, showing we are willing to serve others. But it's more than that:*

*Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, 4 got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. John 13:3-4*

What a powerful statement – underlining Jesus' knowledge of himself as from God, as having all power, knowing that his life on earth was coming to an end.

And notice he took off his outer robe: (recall *Philippians 2:7* - he emptied himself) stripped himself. Took off his outer robe: the outer robe of his earthly existence – stripped back to reveal, manifest the very character of God: Self sacrificial, humble, forgiving, serving others; in a context that only the lowest of servants would be found. Foot washing. Cleansing his disciples of the dirt of their journey in a most intimate act – even the disciple he knew would betray him; readying them to share a meal together: a meal which embodied –enfleshed - forgiveness and serving.

Not just serving, then; but putting all notions of his own status and glory aside. That's the sort of serving we're called into. Love one another as I have loved you. Wash their feet, serve them. Let them go on their way, as went Judas.

**Absolute love:** a love that is willing to forgive; that goes beyond the betrayals of life; beyond any holding onto our status, pride, power; a love that puts an ultimate good before one's one comfort or benefit or rights –and for Jesus- beyond his own life. A love that does not discriminate – even washing the feet of Judas, whom Christ knew was to betray him.

**Sacrament.** This is the night to remember the Lord's Last Supper. Our NT reading - or 1123-26- takes us to the description given by Paul, similarly in Matthew (6:20-29), Mark (14:17-26) and Luke (22:14-23). This year, of course, we're not able to share communion, but we can still remember.

In simple terms, our NT Scripture tonight tells us that we eat the bread and drink the cup in remembrance of Jesus, and as a proclamation of Jesus' death.

But it's more than that: It's not just a memorial, or a recollection. We – historical and traditional Anglicans – identify the Eucharist, Holy Communion – as a Sacrament: an outward sign of an inward and spiritual grace.

Here's the bread; here's the wine: material objects: but as outward signs - not just symbols and elements of remembering. Jesus said – taking the bread: *This is my body; and with the wine: This is my blood of the covenant, poured out for many people for the forgiveness of sins.*

And so we believe he becomes present to us in the bread and wine. We say: Come, let us take this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, *in remembrance that he died for us, and feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.*

In a quite inexplicable way – something happens – there is something else going on in this sharing of bread and wine – the reality of an inward and spiritual grace. This is why we handle the bread and wine with reverence; and dispose of and store the reserved sacrament with reverence.

In many churches (and I don't know how it's usually done at St Nicholas) later in the service, we take the consecrated bread and wine in a solemn procession to a resting place – an altar of repose, in the chapel; to wait there for the night. We are acknowledging the real presence of Christ; somehow present in a particular, powerful, nourishing, life giving way.

I like to say we are re-membering Christ. Taking our broken selves; and our broken corporate self that is the church, Christ's body, and re-membering him. Putting him –us- back together, making us whole. Just like the priest takes the large wafer, breaks it, holds it apart, then brings it back to one.

And so the Spirit of God is at work in us – transforming our own brokenness into wholeness; transforming this discordant, imperfect, fragmentary body of people into his body. Renewed and made whole, members of one single body, ready to act as one.

The invitation for us this night for us goes beyond washing feet; beyond the breaking of bread. It goes beyond just recalling, and takes us into absolute love. Sacrificial, sacramental, self-emptying, serving love.

Let me finish by saying one of the Collects for this day:

*Grant, Lord, that we who receive the holy sacrament of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, may be the means by which the work of his incarnation shall go forward: take, consecrate, break and distribute us, to be for others a means of your grace, and vehicles of your eternal love.*

*Amen*