

May the words of my mouth, and the thoughts of all our hearts be always acceptable to you our God.

John 13:1-17 & 31b- 35 (Farningham Maundy Thursday)

John's Gospel is like a play in 2 acts, and we are just about to start act 2. Act one and the interlude are covered in chapters 1-12 which have covered over two years of Jesus' life.

The curtain now goes up on act 2, chapters 13-19 which covers just the last 24 hours of Jesus' life.

It was just before the festival of the Passover. Jesus knew that his time had come to leave this world and go to be with His father. " **Jesus knowing that the hour would soon be upon Him, He gathers 'his own' to show them the full extent of his love**" (verse 1).

John uses the phrase 'his own' several times throughout his gospel.

Jesus came to 'his own' , but 'his own' did not receive him (ch 1; 11).

The good shepherd however, knew 'his own' sheep and he calls 'his own' out of the fold. (ch 10:3-4)

Now that Jesus had been rejected by 'the Jews' he calls 'his own' out to nourish them ready for the difficulties ahead.

He has always loved his own people in the world; now he loved them right to the end.

It was now supper time and the devil had already put the idea of betraying Jesus into the heart of Judas, son of Simon Iscariot.

Jesus knows everything that is going to happen to him, his origin and his destiny, he knew that the father had given everything into his hands, that he had come from God and was going back to God, His Father.

Jesus rose from the table, lays down his clothes and wrapped a towel around his waist, as He prepares to wash his disciples feet. As he lays down his clothes he lays down his dignity and takes up the role of a servant. Walking in open sandals on unsurfaced roads, dusty and muddy in wet weather made everyone's feet dirty. Water would be supplied to wash your feet. If you were lucky a servant would do it for you. However, so menial was the task it would normally have been done by women, children or non-Jews. But in Jesus the usual order was reversed, Jesus does for us what none of us are prepared to do for each other, Jesus starts to wash the disciples feet. Jesus was a model servant and showed his servant attitude to his disciples. If even, He God, in the

flesh is willing to serve in any way that glorifies God, are you willing to follow Christ's example to serve? Whom can you serve today?

Jesus washing his disciples feet then comes to Peter who splutters a protest in verse 8, 'you will never wash my feet'. It wasn't Jesus job. Was Peter feeling guilty because he hadn't washed his own feet when he had come into the room? He certainly didn't think his master should wash his feet, it wasn't the done thing. He didn't want Jesus to do this for him, he didn't want Jesus to serve him, surely it should be the other way around. Do we sometimes hold back because we are too proud to let Jesus do something for us. Is it all right for us to serve God, but to let him serve us costs us our total surrender to him.

When Jesus responded 'unless I wash you, you won't belong to me', he may have meant that unless he washed away Peter's sins by his death, Peter could have no relationship with him. Or, if Peter would not allow Jesus to minister in this way, Peter would never learn the lesson of humility. Jesus then gently explains what is necessary if Peter is to have any 'share' in him. As impetuous as ever Peter then wants the whole experience, it's all or nothing, wash my hands and head also. Jesus explains it is only their feet that needs washing from walking.

They will continue to need their feet washed as they journey through their life after Jesus has gone, and so Jesus sets the example for them. '**You also should wash one another's feet**' it says in verse 14.

I believe that this was to speak to the disciples to encourage one another in their work and walk with the Lord. As in many of John's narratives, the sense is directed more at the readers, therefore, you and I, of John's gospel as to the disciples within them.

What we need day by day is the regular washing of those parts of ourselves, our personalities and bodies, which get dirty and dusty by our sins.

When Jesus had washed his disciples feet he put on his clothes and sat down again.

As earlier 'signs' led to dialogues to explain them. Now Jesus moves from the sign of foot washing to asking his disciples if they understood what he had done. Verse 12 he said '**do you know what I have done to you?**'

So like any good teacher he goes ahead and gives them the truth, the command and the promise

In John 13:13 we hear the truth:

"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am."

In John 13:15 we hear His command:

"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. "

Now in John 13 verse 17 Here's the promise. "Now that you know these things, you'll be blessed if you do them." (John 13:17)

Now I know that you are not going to go out and wash the feet of every person you meet on the street.

But if we are to do what Jesus commanded, we must be servants!

Being a servant is an attitude, not an action.

What is it that makes the difference between being a servant and not being a servant? Is it visiting a nursing home? Is it baking bread for a friend? Is it giving money to charity?

No, I don't believe it is, because you can visit a nursing home with a servant's heart or you can do it out of duty. You can bake bread because you want to serve somebody, or you can do it because you want them to praise you. You can give money because you really want to share your gifts, or you can give money out of pity or in superiority.

The same action can be the action of a servant or the action of a proud person. What makes the difference is the motivation inside your heart. That motivation should be based on verse 34 -35

³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Love is achieved through effort. Love can get messy. Love is costly. Love requires sacrifice. Love leaves us defenceless.

Although loving one another is not the easy thing to do, it is the necessary thing to do for Christ's kingdom is a kingdom of love. We are commanded to love one another because it is fundamental to our relationship to God. Loving one another must be the earmark of our lives if we are going to be of any use in the kingdom of God. "A new command I give you: Love one another."

As Gary re-enacts the washing of feet, as a symbol love and servant hood, let us come to God with the humility of Jesus, and a servant heart. As we strip the church at the end of the service let us recognise the love that Jesus gave to us, and that love that we should share with others.

As we go through these next 3 days let us think carefully on those words, Let us love one another as Jesus loves us

Let us pray.

Gracious Lord, as we look to your future, fill us with your love, so that we may gladly serve you by serving those around us in deepest need.

Amen