



La Côte Anglican Church

Maundy Thursday – Sermon from Glen Ruffle
28 March 2024 – Holy Communion in Gingins

Professor David Ford, a world-leading Biblical scholar at the University of Cambridge, said that there is **no parallel in any ancient literature of a person of such authority as Jesus**, who in the gospel has commanded demons to leave, sicknesses to disappear, and even the dead to rise, **to then physically bow down to his own servants and do a job of such meniality as to wash their feet.**

There is no parallel in the ancient world of a master of such power serving his own subjects.

This was a slave's job. This was not the job of a King, of a Messiah, of a hero, of a Lord, of a Rabbi, or a teacher. It was **not even the job of a follower**, or a disciple, or a beginner. It was the job of someone without rights, who was property, who did not often even have "personhood".

What we are going to do this evening is thus replicating a **truly revolutionary moment** in world history. And more than that – in all of John's gospel, **the washing of feet is insisted on more than any other action done by Jesus**. He did many miracles in the gospel, but washing feet is the only one **we are instructed to repeat**.

When I was studying theology, we did a module on Sacraments, and I studied Communion and Baptism, and did lots of thinking about those, but it struck me that, here we have in Chapter 13 of John, **another instruction from Jesus to repeat an action** – and while we have kept baptism and communion, the church seems to have had a problem keeping this one going. Apparently, pouring water on a baby or adult, or eating bread and drinking wine, seem somewhat easier to us than serving other people. Dare I say it, but I feel the first two require a lot less of us than the last one....

Yet Jesus has made it really clear: at the beginning of our passage, we see that the full extent of his love was shown. He was not going to rise higher above them, he was going to take their tired, crusty, filthy feet, and wash them, and massage them, and serve these misfits who had followed him around for so long.

And he checks that they understand. It's always good to check people understand: "You call me teacher and Lord – and that is right, because that's who I am to you". **He has clarified that he is not handing over leadership**. Peter, sit down, you are not about to take charge. Just because your master is kneeling before you, does not imply a transfer of power.

So Jesus is still in charge – indeed, we are told that Jesus was at the zenith of his power! "The Father had put all things under his power". **Jesus was never stronger, more in control, or totally clear-minded in knowing exactly what he was about to do. And he chose to wash their feet.**

And he tells them "I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet. You should do the same. I have set you an example." Copy me.

And thus the command comes to us through those disciples and through the gospel.

Now let us be clear – nowadays we all walk around in nice trainers with lovely soft soles and we get manicures and lovely foot massages. The **context** is entirely different – we are not walking barefoot across stones and dung. But the **meaning** of the act is what we are to repeat.

Here, today, we will wash feet, and that is good – we are going to show **submission** and **kindness**, and we are **servicing** and bringing ourselves down. But the meaning applies to much more than feet.

When Jesus says “copy me”, **he knows what he is doing**. And he’s calling us to service, and to **humility**. I do not want to serve the homeless man who shouts at me for money. I find it annoying. **But Christ did not call me to feel annoyance. He called me to serve.** I must serve that homeless man.

When Jesus says “copy me”, **he knows what he is doing**. He’s calling me to spend time visiting and talking with a lonely, elderly person, who wants someone to talk with, to feel they are not forgotten. I might want to watch the latest Star Wars series on Netflix, but Christ calls me to serve.

And **he knows what he is doing**. Because Judas was there, and Judas had his feet washed, and obviously Judas was so disgusted, or disillusioned, or disheartened, that he left this very event and went to betray Jesus. Something about the Lord serving the people seemed to have tipped Judas over the edge.

Serving and humility are things good for us. **Jesus knows what he is doing**. If we avoid this, we can easily get into trouble. Perhaps, had the leaders of the medieval church spent as long on the foot washing as they did on baptism and communion, the reformation would not have needed to happen... humility is good for us. But it is difficult and exposes our hearts in a painful way.

Judas found his heart exposed, and Satan – who had been working there, was able to ‘throw’ in temptation. The Greek says the Devil “threw” temptation into his heart. It sounds like a rush of anger tips him over the edge. But the book of James tells us **sin starts in the mind, in our thoughts, and then evolves to smoulder and eventually catches fire**. This was not a sudden event, it had been growing for a long time.

But had Judas been serving, and doing humility, I really think he would have experienced a changing heart. Notice I said “doing” humility. It is often by **‘doing’** that we bring about a change to our hearts, and we become a **“being”**. Sometimes we have **to do in order to be!** To **do** and **choose to be** what our hearts would rather we did not do.

So let us hear the call from Christ to us today. The call to serve, to emulate Christ, to be like our Lord. He is in control, he is master, and he knows what is best for us.

And he says “copy me”. Serve each other. He knows this is for our benefit.

Let us start with feet. But let us apply this servanthood and love to our whole lives.

Amen.