

MAUNDY THURSDAY COMMUNION SERVICE
Kirknewton Church 2nd April 2015
Extravagant Love

John 13: 1 – 17 Jesus washes his disciples feet

Verse 1: **Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed the full extent of his love, he loved them to the end**

Jesus' journey through Holy Week, from the entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to the cross on Good Friday, tells us much about Jesus' character and mission.

It was a journey of obedience to the will of God

He had to die. **"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified"** (John 12: 23)

It was a journey of fear and stress

He was wholly God but also wholly man. **"Now my heart is troubled"** (John 12: 27). He was to sweat blood in the Garden of Gethsemane

It was a journey filled with sadness

"He was in the world and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him" (John 1: 10)

It was a journey of trust

Jesus would have known the words **The Lord is my strength and my shield, my heart trusts in him** (Psalm 28).

But most of all it was a journey of love

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" John 3 : 16

To be loved by Jesus is an indescribable thing. It is deeper than any of us knows. Words seem inadequate to describe a love that needs to be experienced.

Paul tried to describe that love many times in his letters, he longs for believers to comprehend it. He prayed for us in Ephesians 3 : 18 – **that we might have the power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God”**

Being loved by Jesus means being full of God!

And in our verse from John 13, we are the objects of Jesus’ love. He has shown compassion to the hungry and the sick and the poor but here, in the hours before he goes to the cross, he wants to spend time with his own, with his disciples, with his flock, with those who believe in him, with you and me.

How can we understand this love? In Ephesians 5: 25 Paul compares the love of Christ for his church with the love found between husband and wife in marriage. “Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”

Next week Catherine Alexander will marry Keith in East Calder Church. Catherine will promise in solemn covenant to forsake all others and be united with Keith alone, to love him and cherish him, for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse, in sickness and in health for as long as they both shall live. And of course, Keith will do the same.

This is a tiny reflection of Christ’s love for us. It is a love that unites and cherishes and protects and defends and endures in all circumstances.

John Piper put it this way **“He loved us in life and he loved us in death. Having loved us in the easiest times he loved us in the hardest times. Having loved us with words and bread and touch he loved us with blood and pain and death. Having loved us extensively over years, he loved us intensively to the depths”**

When we truly love someone we will stick with them over time and we will stick with them even when it is costly. Jesus does just that. He has

patiently stuck with us through our wavering faith and weaknesses, our sin and our selfishness, times when we have praised him and times when we have denied him, times when we have remembered him and times when we have forgotten him.

I still like Philip Yancey's quote from his 1997 book *What's so Amazing about Grace?* where he says **Grace means there is nothing I can do to make God love me more, and nothing I can do to make God love me less.**

And in these final precious hours Jesus had to spend "with his own" before his arrest, what was the most gracious, loving and meaningful thing he could do for them or give to them?

He didn't give them lots more words and instructions

He wasn't healing and preaching and raising the dead at that time

He didn't give them a blueprint of how to build a church when he was gone, a church that needed to have strong walls and pews and an organ and so on, the essentials of the Christian faith!

He didn't present them with medal or a keepsake or a badge that said "I knew Jesus!"

He didn't do any of these things. Instead.....he washed their feet!

For Jesus, it was the display of His humility and His servanthood. For the disciples, the washing of their feet was in direct contrast to their heart attitudes at that time.

Walking in sandals on the filthy roads of Palestine in the first century made it imperative that feet be washed before a communal meal, especially since people reclined at a low table and your neighbour's feet might be very much in your face! When Jesus rose from the table and began to wash the feet of the disciples he was doing the work of the lowliest of servants. The disciples must have been stunned at this act of humility and condescension, that Christ, their Lord and master, should wash the feet of His disciples,

when it was their proper work to have washed his. But when Jesus came to earth the first time, he came not as King and Conqueror, but as the suffering Servant of [Isaiah 53](#). As He revealed in [Matthew 20:28](#), He came “not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” The humility expressed by his act with towel and basin foreshadowed his ultimate act of humility and love on the cross.

Jesus’ attitude of servanthood was in direct contrast to that of the disciples, who had recently been arguing among themselves as to which of them was the greatest ([Luke 22:24](#)). Since there was no servant present to wash their feet, it would never have occurred to them to wash one another’s feet. When the Lord Himself stooped to this lowly task, they were stunned into silence. To his credit, though, Peter was profoundly uncomfortable with the Lord washing his feet, and, never being at a loss for words, Peter protested, “You shall never wash my feet!”

Then Jesus said something that must have further shocked Peter: “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me” ([John 13:8](#)). This prompted Peter to say in true Peter fashion, “Then Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!” You can see Peter almost grabbing hold of the bowl and showering the water over himself.

I’ve heard comment that Peter was being his usual impulsive, rather clumsy self. But Peter was crying out through genuine love for Jesus, through an understanding that here stands the Son of God and he wanted with all his heart to be a part of him.

Then Jesus explained the true meaning of being washed by Him. Peter had experienced the cleansing of salvation and did not need to be washed all over again in the spiritual sense. He was clean. He was already born again. He was not yet washed in the blood of the lamb as we are because that hadn’t happened yet, that will happen tomorrow. But the need to have our feet washed regularly symbolises the need to confess and wash away the sins that continue to enter into our lives even as we try to follow Jesus by washing the feet of others.

The disciples had brought dirt and dust from the outside into the room and

it needed to be washed away. We too are contaminated by the dirt and the grime of the world we live in, by some of the people we meet day to day, by the things our eyes see and our ears hear, by the bad choices we sometimes make.

Jesus went on to say in John 15: 19 **As it is, you do not belong to the world but I have chosen you out of the world.**

Paul said in his letter to the Romans **“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind”**

We no longer belong in this world but we have to continue living in this world for the time being. And so we need to come before Jesus daily and confess our sins, seek his forgiveness, ask him to wash our feet, again and again and again.

It doesn't matter how much of a failure you feel or disappointed in yourself or frustrated or angry or afraid. Jesus can take it and he will take it, he will wash your feet and gently dry them with a towel.

I often read Ann Voskamp's daily words. She has an amazing way with words and a simple, deep, vibrant relationship with Jesus which encourages others. Yesterday she wrote -

You know when you get to feeling like a bit of a mess, like a bit of failure, like you could sometimes close a door and weep for your failures and sins and shortcomings and unspoken brokenness? And this week, Jesus looks you right in the eye, and He takes that yoke off your back, He takes that weight off your mind, He takes that heaviness off your heart -- and He carries it because He wants to carry you.... to carry you right through. He looks you right in the eye and says, "I did it for love..." (John3:16) He takes your hand and takes that crown of thorns and he says, "I did it because I had to take you so that you will be with me for all eternity..." (John14:3) He takes that Cross you've been carrying & He lets you walk weightless -- *grace is weightless* -- and He says, "I did it because I desperately wanted you..." (Romans 5:8) Who in this world has ever wanted us like He has?

I like that phrase “**He looks you right in the eye.**” Many pictures of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet show him kneeling down and focused on the feet. I think the picture chosen by Carol for the back of our sheet is more accurate. I think that Jesus looked each disciple fully in the eye and that look conveyed indescribable love and compassion. The disciples looked into the very eyes of God and as they preached the gospel in the years that followed I do not think that they would forget that moment until the day they would look into these eyes again and never have to look away.

Extravagant love from a Saviour who gives and gives and gives.

Frances Young wrote a short poem called “extravagance” in her book “Let the Blessing Fall” and John is going to read it to us before we move on to Communion.

Extravagance

Embrace extravagance
Feel the burn
It flows over dull pebbles
And polishes sharp stones
And shines out their beauty

Try giving
 And giving
 And giving again

Experience extravagance
Feel the love
It flows over our failures
And forgives our sins
And shines out our beauty

He giveth
 And giveth
 And giveth again