

Just Love Them (Maundy Thursday)

Text: John 13:1-17; 31b-35

It sobering for me that ANZAC Day and the remembrances associated with what that day represents occurs so close to this Easter weekend. We should never forget that the struggle for justice and freedom from those things that would bind and oppress us comes at great cost for both man and God.

Just as the story of the Passover in Exodus is grounded in the story of the exodus from oppression, the story of the Lord's Supper is grounded in the story of Christ's betrayal.

Both are pivotal events so profound in nature that for thousands of years they articulated the common understanding of God's liberating work and the costs of the struggle for justice and freedom. Both these bible passages hold within them accounts of bondage and redemption, along with memories of the past and anticipation for the future. Both invite us to gather together to lament and to celebrate.

These biblical texts also push against the notion of radical individualism and privilege that pervades our contemporary culture. Both meals place an emphasis on the sign of salvation — the blood.

While these stories are told through the eyes of ancient peoples, they remain relevant today reminding us that we are helpless and hopeless without God and each other. These meals mark the beginning of a new way of being in community and they invite us to take stock of how we express care and concern for those on the margins both in our congregations and in our society.

When we partake of the Lord's Supper we should do so keeping in mind Christ's revolutionary acts of welcoming strangers, socializing with the "other" and "loving them to the end".

The disciples were undoubtedly shocked and amazed when Jesus took up the basin and the towel and began to wash their feet. He was their master! He was their Lord! Foot washing is just not something that masters do.

If you have ever spent any amount of time in sandals or open shoes of any type then you know that people's feet can get really dry and dirty and calloused and cracked. So imagine walking around for miles, especially when wearing sandals, along the same roads and paths as the teeming throngs of people and animals of the ancient world, no matter how careful you were about where you walked and where you placed your feet in time your feet would become just plain YUK!

In the days of Jesus, foot washing was typically done by the servants of one's household. To wash someone's feet is an act of hospitality and care. It was also an act of servitude and humility.

No wonder Simon Peter told Jesus, "You will never wash my feet." Not Jesus. Not his master. Not the person he has already recognized as "Messiah". Not Jesus. Not ever.

Still, there Jesus was with his wash basin and his towel. He knelt in front of them one by one and washed their feet, calluses and all.

When he was done, he told them why. "I'm setting an example for you," he said. "You also should do what I have done to you."

In that moment, I wonder if the disciples finally 'got it'. They had been hand-selected by Jesus. And in washing their feet Jesus is saying "I'm sending you out into the world, into those crowds of people from whom I called you. Your job? Just love them."

While Jesus have firmly established the foundation of Christian faith in the twin commands to "Love God and to love your neighbor", the expression of that faith is found here in this humble act of service to his friends.

But just in case His disciples may have thinking that wandering around at the heels of the Son of God had conferred some status upon them that put them

above the filth and squalor of the world, that they were somehow exempt from the unpleasant work, of the Christian faith we profess and the discipleship we are called to, Jesus uses this act of washing someone's feet as a graphic example of how his followers are to relate to each other and to the world.

For those Christians who might believe that following Jesus lifts them above the menial tasks that bring us into close contact with the dirt, the cracks, and the calluses of this world, Jesus gives it to us straight

***"I tell you, servants are not greater than their master,
nor are messengers greater than the one who sent
them."***

These are challenging words for us, What if, instead being known as knockers, critics, prudes and protectors of historic ideas and yesterday's values huddled up in a Sunday club the world came to know Christ's disciples as those able and willing to love the ugliness and mess we so often see around us?

Jesus does, after all, give us an example of what this looks like. In an act of painstaking service, he washes the feet of each of his disciples. Eventually, of course, this means that he would get to Judas. He would look up into the eyes of the one who would betray him. He would look down at his dirty, cracked, and callused feet. Then, taking a basin of water and the towel tied around his waist into his hands, he would begin to wash.

Indeed, Jesus means for us to follow the pattern he sets for us, which includes not only loving those who are easy to love, but those who are very difficult to love as well!

As scripture tells us, Jesus loved them – even Judas! – To the very end.

That's a challenge for us to be sure, but it's also good news. Our lives are mixtures of faith and betrayal. Yet, Jesus loves us no less during our moments of sinfulness than he does during our moments of faithfulness. The good news of this passage is this: no matter where we have been, no matter where we are, and no matter where we go, God loves us. In our moments of crisis,

tragedy, celebration, anxiety, pain, and hopelessness, the love of Christ is for us...right to the very end.

Let me finish in prayer

God of our salvation and our freedom, we thank you for this time of remembrance. We thank you for this time of community.

Help us to find hope and renewed faith, in the events of lament and celebration we recognize together in community.

Guide us into authentic community where we express genuine care and concern for one another.

Give us the strength to take off the garments of individualism, selfishness, self-service and pride which hinder us from moving closer together.

Allow us to love one another as you have taught us to do in your own actions both in life and death.

May we remember your examples and may we be examples to others. In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.