**Maundy Thursday Act of Worship – 9th April 2020**

Some of the material in the service today is taken from Nick Fawcett’s book: “Worship through the seasons: Reflective Services for Lent, Holy Week and Easter” (Kevin Mayhew, Suffolk, 2001) In places it might have been adapted. The page numbers in brackets refer to the page numbers in this book.

**Introduction (page 76):**

“The Lord Jesus Christ on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”” (1 Corinthians 11:23b-25).

These are words which always have the power to move and inspire us, no matter how many times we hear them. But today of all days, they have special poignancy, for we are here to recall that night long ago when the words were first spoken and the chain of events to which they point was to be set in motion. Events which were to reveal evil at its worst and good as its best; hatred at its most ugly and love as it most beautiful.

We will hear reflections today based on some of the people most intimately involved in them. But above all we will focus on Jesus – the man who aroused such passion for and against him, such fierce devotion yet such bitter rejection; a man whose unique character demanded a response from all he met, just as it goes on demanding a response from us today.

**Song: From heaven you came helpless babe**

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| 1.. From heaven you came helpless babe,  entered our world, Your glory veiled,  not to be served but to serve,  and give Your life that we might live. | *This is our God, the Servant King,*  *He calls us now to follow Him,*  *to bring our lives as a daily offering*  *of worship to the Servant King.* |
| 2.. There in the garden of tears  my heavy load He chose to bear;  His heart with sorrow was torn,  'Yet not my will but yours,' He said. | *This is our God, the Servant King,*  *He calls us now to follow Him,*  *to bring our lives as a daily offering*  *of worship to the Servant King.* |
| 3.. Come see His hands and His feet,  the scars that speak of sacrifice,  hands that flung stars into space  to cruel nails surrendered. | *This is our God, the Servant King,*  *He calls us now to follow Him,*  *to bring our lives as a daily offering*  *of worship to the Servant King.* |
| 4.. So let us learn how to serve  and in our lives enthrone Him,  each others needs to prefer,  for it is Christ we're serving. | *This is our God, the Servant King,*  *He calls us now to follow Him,*  *to bring our lives as a daily offering*  *of worship to the Servant King.*  Graham Kendrick © 1983 Thankyou Music ccl 275793 |

**Prayer:**

Lord, we praise you that although your majesty and your sovereignty take our breath away, your overpowering love holds us and keeps us safe; and although you are the one with authority who inhabits eternity, in Jesus Christ you came to us and you spoke in words and ways that we can understand.   
We praise you for Christ and the way he shared that Passover meal with his disciples; though they did not understand what he was saying to them, he still sought to prepare them for what he was to happen.

We praise you that, though he was King of creation, the Lord of eternity and the Son of God, he humbled himself and, as he washed the disciples’ feet, he took the role of a household slave.

We praise you for the example of servanthood that he has implanted at the heart of the gospel and infused into our walk with him.

We thank you that he has shown us how true greatness is found in putting service to you and the needs of others before our own expectations and personal satisfaction.

We praise you that, even at the critical moments in his life and ministry, his thoughts were for others and his prayers were focused on your glory.

We praise you for Jesus, and we bring our prayers in his name. Amen.

(Prayer from David Clowes’ “500 More prayer for all occasions” prayer 86, page 55/56, David C Cook, Brighton, 2010)

**Bible Reading: John 13:1-17 – Jesus washes his disciples’ feet**

1 It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”

7 Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”

8 “No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.”

Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”

9 “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!”

10 Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.” 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. 13 “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

**Song: A new commandment I given unto you**

A new commandment I give unto you,

that you love one another as I have loved you,

that you love one another as I have loved you.

By this shall all men know

that you are My disciples,

if you have love one for another.

By this shall all men know

that you are My disciples,

if you have love one for another. (x2)

From John 13 © Roy Crabtree ccl 275793

**Reflection 1: From Eddie Askew’s book “Cross Purposes Meditations and Prayers based on meals with Jesus” page 64** (Leprosy Mission International, Middlesex, 1995.)

“You can never predict how Jesus will act. That’s one of the joys and uncertainties of following him. We try to box him in with our own rules and dogmas, but again and again he takes us by surprise.

A few days earlier, Jesus had been as supper in Bethany. There he’d reclined at the table whole Mary washed his feet, perfumed them and dried them with her hair. An extravagant picture but one in which we see a disciple honouring the teacher, the lesser paying homage to the greater.

Now Jesus turns everything upside down. It’s he who lifts the jug and bowl. Jesus who kneels and takes their feet in his hands. It must have shattered them, these men who’d just been quarrelling about their own importance, to see him take on the role of servant.

If find what Jesus did easy to accept as long as I can keep it general. His action in washing the disciples’ feet is a lovely image of service and humility, a parable of what the Kingdom of God is all about. The last first, the first last and all the other ideals of relationship. But when I start to particularise it all, when I start giving names to those whose feet Jesus was washing, then the difficulties begin.

I think of Jesus washing Matthew’s feet – that old dishonest, even if reformed, tax collector and outcast. A man unwelcome in synagogue and polite society. Then Thomas’ feet – the one who had his doubts and voiced them. And most of all I find it difficult to picture Jesus kneeling in front of Judas, taking his feet in his hands with the same love he offered to them all.

I wonder how Judas felt, how his toes curled up in embarrassment and guilt? Was it his body language then, his tension, that told Jesus of disloyalty and betrayal?

Sometimes I take my thoughts a little further and try to imagine my own feelings as I realise that Jesus is keeling at my feet….”

**Reflection 2:**

Think of a time when you have invited people to your home for a meal or you have been invited somewhere for a meal. Picture the people around the table…were they family and/or friends? Were they people you knew or people you knew only a little?

What strikes me about this Passover Meal that Jesus celebrated with his disciples is that Jesus knew he would be let down and even betrayed by one or more of the people who were reclining with him. And yet Jesus ate with them. He didn’t ask anyone to leave the meal. He didn’t point the finger at any of the. He simply reclined at the table.

Eating in those times meant acceptance. And despite knowing that Judas would hand him over, despite him knowing that Peter would deny him, Jesus still allowed them to recline at the meal table with him.

He didn’t name and shame those who would betray him a matter of hours later. He continued to eat the meal with them.

In the Bible reading from John’s gospel we also heard that Jesus took off his outer clothing, wrapped a towel around his waist knelt down and washed the feet of his disciples. Feet that were no doubt dirty from the dust of the Jerusalem terrain. But I wonder if the dirt of sinfulness is also represented here in the foot washing.

Imagine *now* that you are an invited guest, that you are reclining at the same table and hearing the same words from Jesus’ lips. You finish your meal and you watch as Jesus rises from the table, wraps the towel around his waist. One by one he moves around the table washing the feet of the guests.

Eventually he kneels at your feet. The towel around his waist, the basin if water and he lifts your feet into the bowl and washes them. The Son of God, the Saviour of the World is washing your feet.

Two questions for you to ponder – two questions that only you can answer:

1. What is Jesus saying to you?
2. What are you saying to Jesus?

Let us take a few moments of quiet reflection before I lead us in prayer…

**Prayers:**

Lord we thank you that in you we have the best example of how we should serve. May we, like you, serve without counting the cost. We give you thanks for your willingness to wash our feet and to clean the dirtiness in our lives.

We thank you that as you prepared for the cross you were willing to wash the feet of those who would let you down when the pressure was applied.

We thank you that love was the reason you washed the feet of the disciples. It was love that enabled you to recline with them and eat.

We thank you that we can never stray from your love. We can never walk too far so that we can never return to you to be cleansed and renewed.

In this time of isolation whether on our own or with family…may we know your presence with us through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Before the words of our blessing I want to invite you after the blessing to listen to a piece of Taize music called “Stay with me”. As you listen please close your eyes and reflect on the words that are being sung. They are taken from Matthew’s gospel when, fully of sorrow, Jesus asks the disciples to stay with him and keep watch with him.

**Blessing:**

May God, who is love, be with you and me, today and always. Amen.

**Song: Stay with me, stay here with me (Taize song)**

Stay with me, remain here with me.  
Watch and pray, watch and pray.

*(repeated several times on the CD)*