

Maundy Thursday

Have you noticed our cracked pot. It is still here. Still with us as we draw close to the end of our Lenten journey.. still cracked. still repaired. Still with the gold of experience. But, tonight, empty. No cloth pouring from it. Empty and alone, after the foot washing, deserted..

‘You will never wash my feet’ my clean shod feet.

When was the last time anyone washed you? Was it when you were in love?

Was it when you were ill in hospital, and such a comfort and relief to be washed in bed? Or was it beyond memory when you were a child? Washing is almost the first thing that happens when you are born, and after you die.¹

‘You will never wash my feet.’

‘It’s not about you – for once it’s not about you, it’s about me’

Jesus might have said: ‘I need to wash your feet. You are my friend. Let me do this for you.’

I shrink back. My feet have always been sensitive. Exposing myself before him, making myself vulnerable before the one I serve – I don’t know. ‘Yet’, he says, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no share with me’. I didn’t realise it was that important. My heart stops – ‘okay, wash all of me’ ‘all of me’ ‘I want to be part of you, part of this – I just don’t want to be vulnerable. It’s too hard’

What’s going on here? There’s obviously more than meets the eye. The whole evening is charged with meaning, symbol, emotion.

‘Do you know what I have done to you?’ He starts to wash our feet, and still I am unable to receive his love – I, who am strong outspoken, will defend him to the end. I am ruffled. What do you want from me?

Do you know what I have done to you?

The words of the hymn echo in my mind.

¹ inspired by Narratives and Passions Words for Transformation, Martin Smith SSIE Darton, Longman and Todd 1996

‘Brother, sister let me serve you let me be as Christ to you
pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.’

What a strange and wonderful God. You call me to be your hands and feet. You call me to serve, but this ministry is to be one of equality, mutuality – I must allow myself to be served.

We cannot get away with anything. We are accountable to each other. In each other we find God. ‘Whenever you did it to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it for/to me’.

It is Maundy Thursday. The day before the end – Jesus death – and the beginning. Jesus shares a meal with his closest friends. John’s gospel doesn’t mention the inauguration of the Eucharist. For him it is symbolised in the washing of the feet – the outpouring of love – as in Baptism.

Martin Smith reflects:

‘Baptism is an event that is done to us. No one can baptise himself or herself. Baptism is done to us to convey what Christ did to us while we were yet helpless. Christ crucified and risen has given birth to us to our new selves, reconciled to the God of love. Christ has washed and healed us of guilt. Christ has freely taken us to himself in an intimacy without shame, a new naked innocence of prayer and closeness, he is in us and we in him, which re grounds our life in unconditional love’.²

In the Eucharist is the renewal, the refreshing, as often as we receive. It is Maundy Thursday. Jesus shares a meal with his closest friends.

How the air is charged. His betrayer, betrayers, sit beside him and eat. He sees into their hearts and grieves.

So much love is present here tonight; so much fear, so much potential to be good and evil, to love and hate.

Then he breaks the bread ‘this is my body.’

The wine,
‘this is my blood.’

² p 145 Narratives and Passions – words for transformation by Martin L Smith SSJE Dorton, Longman & Todd, London, 1996

Familiar acts transformed. Do this to remember me.

So carnal.

We are hushed. We eat. We drink - unanswered questions silent on our lips.

We are washed

We eat, we drink. We are fed, nourished, nurtured, loved.

‘Do you know what I have done to you?’

‘Tonight when you have fed on Christ in the bread and the cup, look down at him at your feet, and hear him ask you, ‘Do you know what I have done to you?’ Do not hide behind silence. Answer him. Tell him what you know.

‘Christ, I know what you have done to me today, what you do to me week by week. In this holy eating and drinking you re-enter the bloodstream of my being, you unite yourself afresh with me. You nourish what is needy in me, you cleanse what is soiled, you embrace back to life my innermost self that halts and falters on its journey to fullness. You have given me yourself, and so, being found again inseparable from you, I find myself in God and with God, where I belong’³, on this Maundy Thursday at St Paul’s Cathedral, Sale.⁴

After that lovely meal, a bit much wine perhaps, they were all a bit tense, with Jesus upsetting the Jewish leaders, and him washing their feet and all..

What were they to make of it?

Now, in that garden he seems so alone, and desperate. His friends, Peter and James and John, tried, they really did, but the tension, they just couldn’t stay awake. They were so human. Like me, like us.

Jesus prayed, desperately, wishing things could be different.. but knowing in his heart that this was it. This was the end, the culmination of his ministry..

If I were to speak with him, what would he say?

³ p 146 Smith

⁴ https://resources.holycovenant.org.au/docs/sermons/2009/Sermon_2009-04-09.pdf

“Sit here while I pray.”

“I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.”

Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.”

“Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

“Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand

Jesus prayed to his daddy, father.. he goes apart. He tells it like it is, and we, we, let him down, again.. after all the eating and drinking and joking around, after all his talks, and his healing, and his challenging, after his insisting on washing our feet, it comes to this.. where will it all end?

Susanna