

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

*Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father.*

*Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*

*The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him.*

*And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.*

*He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?'*

*Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.'*

*Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.'*

*Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!'*

*Jesus said to him, 'One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.'*

*For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'*

*After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.*

*Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.'*

*When Judas had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.*

*Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come."*

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'*

Picture the scene: Jesus is having dinner with his friends, and they are all reclining around the table. Oil lamps provide soft light; people chatter and laugh, passing bowls of food around. Then Jesus gets up from the table without saying anything, takes off a layer of clothing and ties a towel around his waist. The conversation dies down as the disciples notice what's happening.

Then Jesus pours water into a basin and carries it to the table, puts it on the floor and kneels beside one of his friends to wash his feet.

But this is a job for slaves, not for the Master! What's going on? There is shocked silence as Jesus washes and dries the feet of his friends, until he gets to Simon Peter.

Never backwards in coming forwards, Peter voices what perhaps they had all been thinking: 'Lord, are YOU going to wash my feet?' And even as Jesus says, 'You will understand later why I am doing this', Peter blurts out 'You will never wash my feet!'

When Jesus explains that he needs to be washed like all the others, he said 'Well wash my hands and head as well then!' Jesus patiently explains that washing his feet is all that is needed.

Then Jesus asks if they have understood what he has done to them, reminding them that he is their Lord and Teacher- but he has washed their feet, he has done the most humble thing imaginable, and the reason is that he wants THEM to wash one another's feet. He has set an example for every disciple to follow; and that includes us. We are to wash one another's feet.

Not only that, but we are to allow our own feet to be washed- and that can be really hard. Many if not most of us are much happier doing things for others, helping other people, than we are receiving help from others.

How hard is it for us independent, proud and private people to accept and admit that we might need help? How many of us refuse offers of help and say, 'No, I'm fine thank you, I can manage.' We might be thinking to ourselves 'I don't want to be a burden, I don't want any fuss', or even- 'I don't want to be beholden to anyone.'

Refusing the loving help of another may be seen as sinful pride, and Jesus wants us to put away that pride and gladly accept the love shown to us by others.

Currently many of us are self-isolating and relying on deliveries of food and supplies. If we become unwell we will be forced to seek and accept help; but Jesus expects us to be gracious in our acceptance of any and all help that is offered to us.

Jesus gave us his new commandment- that we love one another as he loves us. That means we will wash each other's feet, we will love one another even- or especially- when it's really hard.

It also means that we will allow someone else to wash OUR feet- which just might feel even harder.

Don't forget, Jesus washed Judas's feet as well. He showed the same love to the person who betrayed him as he did to the ones who would live and die for him. Are we able to do that?

Would we be able to love those who would do us harm? Can we pray for their families? Can we pray that those who teach and preach violence and hate will leave the darkness and come into the light of God's love?

Jesus didn't say 'I'd quite like it if you were all nice to one another, at least most of the time, if you wouldn't mind, please...'

He declared, 'I give you a new commandment.' Loving one another is not optional.

Loving us, loving humanity, cost Jesus his life. He entered into our human experience and saw it through until the end, so that we need never feel alone and abandoned. So let us love one another, sisters and brothers. Let's do that.

The Lord be with you.