

**St Nicolas Church, Carine-Duncraig**  
**Maundy Thursday, April 14, 2022 – Grahame Bowland**  
**1 Corinthians 11.23-26, John 13.1-17, 31-35**

Tonight we come together at the beginning of the Triduum, the three great, high Holy Days of Easter.

Perhaps I might begin by posing a question – why are we here?

Why do we, the Christian community, year after year, generation after generation, immerse ourselves in the events of the last week of Jesus' earthly ministry? After all, it is not an easy thing to do.

This week we enter into that last week with our minds, our bodies, and our spirits. Later in the service, those of us who are able to and who choose to participate will wash each other's feet, physically emulating the example of humble service set for us by our Lord.

Last Sunday, Palm Sunday, we gathered together and walked behind Jesus as he entered into Jerusalem, heralded triumphantly by his disciples:

“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!”<sup>1</sup>

And yet, we all know how quickly the story changes. The horror and shame of the torture and crucifixion of our Lord looms large over Holy Week. Tomorrow we will stand together at the foot of the Cross. On Saturday we will experience the silent desolation of all creation, as the Son of God lies dead in the tomb. And yet we look also to Sunday, to resurrection, to life renewed, to the triumph of our Lord over sin and death.

And so today, Maundy Thursday, we stand on a boundary between horror, and hope. We experience fear, and we anticipate joy. Fear, and joy. These two emotions don't sit together easily. For me, at least, holding those two emotions together instils a restlessness, a discomfort, an anxiety. And yet it is fear and joy that pervade that last meal which Jesus shared with his disciples, his friends, his companions upon the way. Jesus was arrested only hours after instituting the Eucharist.

So, perhaps, here we might find an answer to the question that I posed: why are we here?

By immersing ourselves, mind, body, and spirit, in the last week of Jesus's earthly ministry, we make those events truly real. We enter into the story not as a retelling, not as some curiosity of a distant history, but as a reality *now*.

We have all heard of the horrific events unfolding in Ukraine. As a community, we have prayed for peace.

I am holding up a photograph of the congregation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Saint Andrew and All Saints.<sup>2</sup> The church is located in the town of Bucha, outside the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv.

This church has been in the news, its building standing in the background of photographs and film of a mass grave, the result of a war crime. Many innocent people were killed by occupying soldiers, and buried at the rear of the church building. Innocent members of the community, buried in a mass grave, at the back of their church.

The photograph I am holding shows the congregation regathered in the wake of that horror, even as war crimes investigators work outside, documenting the violence that was inflicted upon their community. And so this photograph shows a community standing in the shadow of horror. I hope that we will all pray for them, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 19:38

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=5199975153397386&id=100001548573759](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=5199975153397386&id=100001548573759)

When the people of Saint Andrew and All Saints were first able to gather again, they celebrated the Divine Liturgy, the Eucharist.

Why?

Perhaps, because in the Eucharist we find hope. The Eucharist points always to the victory of Jesus Christ, who came among us, and triumphed over the worst that humanity can do. The Eucharist points to resurrection, new life, the saving, restoring, and glorious abundance of God. The Eucharist points to the transformation and reconciliation of creation to Godself.

Where could that hope have been needed more? We might pray that the community at St Andrew and All Saints, in their great need, experienced that hope.

Horror is not a thing of the past. As humanity turned away from Christ, as humanity ran from Christ, as humanity crucified Christ, so humanity continues to turn upon itself. And so, the Eucharist remains situated on a boundary between horror and hope, between fear and joy.

The great Orthodox theologian, Alexander Schmemmann, reminds us that the Eucharist, each time it is celebrated, represents a *re-membering*. Not a merely a historical remembering, but a gathering together of the members of the Body of Christ in the *here and now*.

Our physical participation in the worship of God – the liturgy, the work of the people – reminds us that we are all members of Christ's body, each with particular gifts, each with a particular calling. As each of us, members of the Body of Christ, come together to eat at the Lord's table, we are reminded that Jesus has called us to be his disciples. We are called, in the here and now, to build up the Kingdom of God.

How are we to build up that Kingdom? How can that Kingdom be built in this difficult world? It seems almost too much.

In today's Gospel, Jesus washes the feet of his disciples. It's an act of service that we are used to, an old and familiar story. We must remember how shocking it was for the disciples when Jesus took up a towel, and knelt to wash the feet of his friends. Our Gospel passage tells of Peter reacting with great distress when Jesus makes to wash his feet. He even commands his Lord to stop.

In the society of the time, to wash feet was the work of a servant, the lowliest member of a household. No great leader, no King, would ever bend down to wash the feet of another. Even though the washing of feet is an old and familiar custom, perhaps for many of us it remains and awkward and perhaps even an uncomfortable one. Discomfort can be a very great gift. For, if we are uncomfortable in following the example of our Lord, we might ask ourselves once more that simple question: why?

This evening, through the simple communal act of washing feet, we see the discipleship of our community made real and visible. Even if it is a little bit of an uncomfortable thing to do. And so we see that our faith cannot simply be an intellectual exercise, something that belongs only to our minds.

As we turn to God, as we grow in our discipleship, we ourselves are transformed by God's Grace. We are called to emulate the ministry of Christ. We are called to act, to build up the Kingdom of God, making use of all the gifts that have been given to us. Tonight we will see friends, acting humbly in service to their friends. There's great hope to be found in that.

Indeed, it points to the ultimate hope which we find in the Eucharist, the joyful reconciliation between humanity and its Creator which God makes possible through God's own ever-abundant, overflowing, and freely given grace. And so, may we find hope throughout the Triduum, as we as a community enter into the difficult, emotional, costly journey of the coming three days. May we, through this experience, and with God's grace, be grown in our discipleship. *Amen.*