

‘Do you know what I have done to you, for you?’ *John 13*

That is a question that stands at the heart of our reflection on Holy Week, at the heart of our reflection on what it means to be a follower of Jesus. In the passage we read as our Gospel reading, the question is set in the context of Jesus’ washing of the disciples’ feet. Tonight this passage is set in the context of our service of Holy Communion, the Lord’s Supper, the Eucharist. As we break the bread, as we drink the cup we remember what he did for us,

‘Do you know what I have done to you, do you know what I have done for you.

All the Gospel readings for Holy Week are drawn from St John’s Gospel. This Gospel, written after the other three, is the most structured, most reflective of the four. It is as if he had time to think, to reflect, how he was going to present the Gospel of Christ, son of God, son of man, his teaching, his actions, his life, death and resurrection. He is very precise in his use of language. ‘Do you know what I have done for you, to you?’ The Greek in which John was writing has two ways of expressing an event in the past – one just refers to an event in the past, the other, the perfect tense, refers to an event that has past but has a lasting significance. It is this last form that John is using here. His washing of his disciples feet was not some casual, off the cuff, last minute thought of Jesus. This was a deliberate action that went far beyond the minor domestic chore of washing the feet of those sitting down for a meal.

We will see this very deliberate use of language as we follow the story on Good Friday in our reading from chapters 18 and 19. You recall, that when Pilate wrote the charge to be fixed on the cross, 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews', the leaders objected saying he should write 'He claimed to be King of the Jews'. Pilate retorts, 'What I have written, I have written.' This goes beyond my opinion, your opinion – this is who he is.

As his suffering draws to a close, we are told of Jesus crying with a loud voice 'It is finished!', it is accomplished. Again this is written in the perfect tense, this is a decisive event, not just for that particular time, not just for now, but for all time.

To go back to our Gospel reading:

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?"¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord--and you are right, for that is what I am.¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. *John 13:12-15*

Do you know what I have done for you?

I have set you an example

Foot washing – that has been a tradition that has never really taken, isn't it? The Church readily adopted the command to break the bread and drink the cup. - but not this. What is it about it? Is it the awkwardness? That should not surprise us – Peter did not feel comfortable with it, with letting Jesus wash his feet.

"Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸ Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet."

It just didn't feel right – he didn't feel comfortable with it, with Jesus at his feet, serving him. And then Jesus says this:

"Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."

Then it occurred to me – there is an awkwardness to grace. Maybe we need to feel something of that awkwardness, the awkwardness of God meeting my needs before I can be of any use to him.

It is Jesus who washes their feet, it is Jesus who dies on the Cross. Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury when I was growing up, who in his day worked tirelessly to bring the Church of England and the Methodist Church together, once wrote this:

My Christian faith begins not with anything I can do for Christ, but in what Christ has done for me.

Jesus dies for us – there is nothing we can do for him. And if he dies for me, he dies for others – for the one who is different, different creed, different race, different gender, different class; he dies for the person I don't particularly like, he dies for the person who doesn't like me. He washes all our feet, he dies for all our sins.

"Do you know what I have done to you? ¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done for you. We are called not just to observe; we are not called just to admire, we are called to follow.

Because as John reminds us in the very precise and structured way he tells his story; these are not events in the dim and distant past that may interest us. These are events that stand at the very cornerstone of history, events of eternal significance. So we are not called to a vague curiosity, we are called to follow the Christ who kneels and who washes the feet, the feet of the one who is to betray him, the feet of the one who is to deny him, the feet of those who are going to run away – none are beyond his service, none are beyond his love.

The Paul writes to his beloved Philippians:

⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
⁶ who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
⁷ but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
⁸ he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death--
even death on a cross.

He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, the one who performs the most menial of tasks, the one who gives himself, totally and utterly in the service of others. It is as we allow him to serve us, to meet our deepest needs of forgiveness, of inadequacy, of fear – it is as we go with the awkwardness of grace – that we meet him and are enabled to become like him - and he meets us in our desire to worship and serve him who is very source of my being.

In the words of the hymn by Graham Kendrick, 'From heav'n you came:'

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

3 Come see his hands and his feet,
the scars that speak of sacrifice,
hands that flung stars into space
to cruel nails surrendered.

4 So let us learn how to serve,
and in our lives enthrone him;
each other's 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.*