**MAUNDY THURSDAY 2020**

I have always been taught to ***‘expect the unexpected’*** but who could ever have expected what we are experiencing together right now?

I am sure that the same thing was true for those disciples in the upper room preparing to celebrate their Passover together. Now I’m aware that you all know that the washing of feet in the first century was commonplace and practical. It was the job of the host to provide water for guests to cleanse themselves. However, servants were not the only ones who washed feet. We would be a mistake if we thought foot washing only indicated servility. Sometimes foot washing was a token of love or devotion. For example, a Jewish student might wash his rabbi’s feet, or a lover might bathe the feet of the object of his or her affection.

A first century literary work tells the story of the marriage between a man named Joseph and his bride, Asenath. Asenath offers to wash Joseph’s feet; Joseph protests that a servant girl could do it. But Asenath exclaims devotedly, ***“Your feet are my feet; another shall not wash your feet.”*** Aah!! I somehow don’t think Jackie will be thinking that way even in our self-isolation!

So, perhaps it not surprising that, at this supper, John mentions for us that feet are getting washed. What is surprising is ***who*** is washing them. That was really unexpected - even shocking! Jesus, by washing the feet of his disciples, has reversed the assumed roles of the day. He, the Teacher and Lord, has made himself the servant. Jesus, who should be the object of all human affection, makes himself the devoted one, the loving one.

The way Peter balks at Jesus’ action indicates how indelible an impression Jesus was making on another of his followers. This is clearly a carefully crafted teaching moment. Jesus says to his disciples, ***“You call me Teacher and Lord and this is correct, for so I am.”*** Implied question: ***Why then have I just behaved so strangely?*** Answer: ***“If I, being greater than you, have done such a thing to you, so also must you serve one another.”*** The spirit of the lesson Jesus teaches is clear: Divine love is expressed to us in humility of action and we must express it to each other in exactly the same way.

We live in a culture that tends to reduce love to a mere feeling. But Jesus said, ***“blessed are you if you do these things.”*** If we are honest, we know that it is, sadly, quite possible for us to believe that we love our fellow human beings but yet behave in the most unloving ways. In these times, we only have to think of the recent undignified, unloving, greedy and selfish scrambles we have witnessed, by those who would, I’m sure, claim to be intelligent, loving people, over toilet rolls, hand sanitiser rice and pasta, while we live in one of the richest and well-supplied countries in the world.

By what he says and does Jesus communicates to us that each one of us is of immense value to God. God loves us. The fact that God loves us does not just mean that God has a strong feeling. Jesus enacts the love of God. He puts flesh on it - and how!

Knowing that the appointed time for his death was imminent and knowing that he had come from God and would soon return to God, Jesus acts out what his death will accomplish. He stands and lays aside his outer garments, and proceeds to wash his disciples’ feet. When he has accomplished this task, he takes up again his clothing and resumes his place as Lord.

Jesus promises that, if we will be washed by him, we will have an inheritance in him. The Israelites after Passover were led to the land that was their inheritance. After what happened on that first Good Friday and the following Easter Sunday, we will receive our inheritance – the undeserved gift of eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

The way to this kingdom is the way of the cross. Jesus loves his own perfectly and completely, even to the giving of his own life. He has commanded us to love each other in the same way, to lay down our lives for each other, and in so doing to experience the fullness of his love. For us as Christians, there is an inseparable connection between love, service and self-sacrifice.

The Christian life and being a follower of Jesus all comes down to what somebody has called ***“basin theology”.*** We can be like Pilate and call for a basin to wash our hands of Jesus, or we can be like Jesus and call for a basin to wash the feet of others for Jesus’ sake. Someone put it like this: “Many of us are poor spellers – we think ***“service”*** is spelled ***“serve us.****”*

So, as make our Easter pilgrimage through Good Friday and Easter Sunday in what is a most unexpected way, let us determine to fervently love one another; let us serve each other with zeal and devotion lest we hear Jesus words recorded in the gospel of Luke***, “Why do you call me Lord, but not do what I say?”*** but, instead, let us make Jesus’ words true of us, ***“When you love one another, then you are my disciples.”***