

loving service
a sermon preached on
maundy thursday
18 April 2019
at
st john's
ANGLICAN CHURCH CAMBERWELL
by the reverend colleen clayton

the lections: Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14; Psalm 116; 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Feet: each one has 26 bones, 33 joints, and more than a hundred muscles, tendons and ligaments.

In language, it is desirable to have the world at one's feet. That often happens after having landed on one's feet, got a foot in the door, started off on the right foot, found one's feet, put one's best foot forward and, dipped a toe in the water.

It almost never happens if one drags one's feet, puts one's foot in it, has foot-in-mouth disease, tries to have a foot in both camps, or demonstrates that one has feet of clay.

Feet: so important and yet so overlooked.

There are few things that are cuter than new born babies' feet. Or more inducing of tenderness than the sight of a huge, hairy, stinky teenage foot sticking out from under the doona that is covering the rest of the body.

When my children were little, Maundy Thursday was their favourite service of the whole year. Part of what they loved was the fascination of seeing all the adults with shoes and socks off, down on their knees washing each other's bare feet.

Most of the time, my feet exist at the end of my legs and carry me through the day without me giving them much thought. But, in November last year, my husband and I went to Southern Europe to spend six weeks walking in various locations, including along part of one of the Camino routes. In that time of walking upwards of twenty kilometres a day, carrying a backpack and keeping on going, day after day, I developed a new appreciation of my feet and their needs. There were many nights when I would have loved someone to tenderly bathe them as Jesus did his disciples' feet.

Jesus said, "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." (John 13:13-15) Although Jesus is the incarnate son of God, he stoops to wash the feet of his disciples. Service for sure, but more particularly, service of the grotty and the overlooked. Jesus' point, the point we remember on Maundy Thursday, is that the measure of our love is the extent to which we work care for and nurture the weak, the marginalised and the overlooked.

Maundy Thursday reminds us that we are called to care tenderly for the grotty and overlooked aspects of ourselves and of each other, to love and care for the feet of the world; those who work without recognition, those who are grotty and unpleasant, all who are overlooked.

And just in case we decide to turn this into a nice piece of piety of which we can feel proud, we are called to be humble enough to accept the service that others offer to us. Others who we may prefer not to notice and who we may believe have nothing to give.

In this story of inter-connection and shared vulnerability, we are invited to see and accept our own needs and the needs of those around us. We are invited to turn our gaze and our attention to those we usually ignore and to involve ourselves in both serving and being served; to blur the lines that distinguish who has the resources and who has the need. To see the dignity that goes with service and the dignity that can accept service too.

Real connection and love is only possible through mutuality; the mutual awareness of our shared humanity, the ability to be vulnerable, one to the other, sharing our overlooked and undervalued parts so that, as we serve each other, we help each other to grow into the joy and beauty of the love that is God's gift to us through Jesus.

So often we try to overlook the reality that we are all intimately connected; that to live abundant lives we must first know our dependence on God, then on each other and then on this beautiful, fragile world. Nothing, and no-one, can be overlooked without diminishing the life of all.

Maundy Thursday guides us, gently but powerfully into the unfolding story of Jesus giving his life in the ultimate act of loving service; caring, to the last, for the grotty, the unlovely, the ignored and the overlooked.