

# Holy Week Sermon

**Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 – Maundy Thursday**

*Exodus 12.1-4, 11-14; Psalm 116.12-19; 1 Corinthians 11.23-26; John 13.1-17, 31b-35*

You could describe a Christian community as a group of people who try to be good ..... at bearing with one another. At forgiving one another for their weaknesses, irritating behaviours and failings, at humbly serving one another in the service of Christ. A good Christian community is one that is good at washing one another's feet.

The model for this way of loving, is how Jesus loved his disciples, how Jesus loves us, how God loves you and me as his beloved children. Good parents go on loving and serving their children, even when they go serious astray. Even when it has to be tough love, the loving never stops. And in the drama of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, and then giving them the new commandment that his followers are to love one another as he has loved them, Jesus calls us to do them same.

So today, the first day of the Tridium, the first of the three holiest days of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Day, is the day of the New Commandment. This is the day of celebration that Christians should love one another as Jesus loves them, and that by this they will be known as the disciples of Jesus. They will be known, not just by good works, not just by religious fervour, but principally, principally, by the quality of their Christ-like love for one another.

And of course we fail. Often. But that should not stop us trying to be good ..... at washing one another's feet, bearing with one another in our struggles to be faithful followers of Jesus. And on the second day of the Easter Tridium, on Good Friday, we see how much God in Christ forgives us even for these failures. And we see how very deeply we are loved. And on the third day, on Easter Day, we see the truth and beauty of all this reconciliation.

On every Sunday, and every time when we celebrate the Holy Communion, we affirm our commitment to this bearing with one another as the disciples of Jesus. In St John's gospel, the washing of feet stands in place of an account of the institution of Holy Communion. Instead of "Do this in remembrance of me," we have "Love one another as I have loved you." The gospel of John is not intended to stand alone. It was written to stand alongside the other gospels and to interpret them, to go even deeper.

So in this passage, John is giving us a profound insight into what Holy Communion is really calling us to be and to do. In remembering Jesus, we are called to take our part in the Christian community which is seeking to be faithful to the new commandment and to be good ..... at washing one another's feet, at bearing with one another for the sake of Jesus Christ.

It is this quality of loving one another, that really makes the difference as to whether churches grow or not. Of course lots of other things matter too, the quality of worship, the quality of service to the wider community, the quality of welcome to the house of God, the quality of service in the life of the church, the quality of good administration, and so on. We need to try and do all these need well too. But without a faithful following of the new

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commandment for Christians to love one another as Jesus loves us, it is hard for churches to grow much. For love covers a multitude of sins.

For in a church that is truly practising the new commandment, anyone who comes in, finds themselves enfolded in the love of Christ. This doesn't mean that anything goes, that sin doesn't matter. Wrong actions have consequences, and wrong behaviour needs to be opposed. But as with beloved children, the loving doesn't stop. Ever.

Of course Christians cannot do this on their own. We absolutely depend of the love of God, and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit, to keep this new commandment. This Holy Communion service reminds us deeply of this. To be able to keep this new commandment, we need to be continually fed and strengthened by God. We cannot do it in our own power. Human nature is just too weak.

A Christian community as a group of people who try to be good ..... at bearing with one another. At forgiving one another for their weaknesses, irritating behaviours and failings, at humbly serving one another in the service of Christ; a community that is good at washing one another's feet. And a Christian community also is one that knows its absolute need for God to have any hope at all of achieving this. Amen.

CJ. 1.4.21