

Homily “Love One Another” Maundy Thursday April 1, 2021 By Pastor Kit Greaves

Pray I met a couple some time ago; he was clever, musical and funny and she was down to earth and caring of others. After having four children of their own, it was their mission to foster children no one else wanted. One lad with severe challenges came to live with them, they re-modelled their home for a wheelchair and hoist. The doctors said he wasn't expected to live to age 13. He's now in his early thirties, a university graduate and entrepreneur assisting others with mobility challenges. What is this love?

This evening our Lenten observance approaches its climax as we gather with Christians around the world - online mostly, during the pandemic - to mark the three days of Jesus' last supper, his death and resurrection. Tonight, we remember Christ's last meal with his disciples, but the central focus is his commandment that we are called to put into action: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34, 35)

The primary image for Maundy Thursday is the servant who carries out acts of love. The image of the servant is less recognizable as a symbol today. Wait staff in restaurants, maybe - you remember restaurants and waiters? – they capture something of it. Jesus demonstrated what love looks like, by serving; serving in their culture meant acting with hospitality toward guests, in this case, washing the guest's feet, even the dirtiest feet. Can you imagine washing the feet of the one you knew was going to betray you? Or the embarrassment of having someone like Queen Elizabeth or Drake or pick your hero, wash YOUR feet? Jesus knew he came to die, he predicted it several times, and rebuked one of his best friends Peter for telling him he was not going to die, so in a strange way, for Jesus to say to Judas in John 13:27 “what you are about to do, do it quickly,” was an acknowledgement that Jesus was committed to fulfill what was written. Judas had grown disgusted with Jesus - a leader? stooping down, washing stinky feet?? - saw him as a failed leader in a failed overthrow of the authorities. Satan used Judas' pain of disappointment, moving him to betray Jesus to the Chief Priests.

Evil compared to good is like bread mold compared to fresh bread. It feeds on the original thing. Even humans made in the image of the creator can take bread mold and make penicillin from it, something good out of something bad. God can take the worst of evil events as he demonstrated in Maundy Thursday's betrayal and Good Friday's crucifixion, the ultimate healing medicine for the worst ailment of all, our sin and our pride, and transform them for good.

So even Judas' betrayal, God could turn to good. Jesus knew he came to die and to be raised; servants follow through on their master's command; that's where glory lay. And, there would be a surprise for Satan Easter morning. The penalty of sin had been paid. Then, boom! Resurrection! Watch out Satan. Victory goes to the faithful in Christ.

Whenever you scrub dirty dishes, unplug a toilet, mop a muddy floor, vacuum, dust, take out recycling or trash, clip your toenails or someone else's toenails; whenever you carry out, to the best of your ability, the work to which you are called, as humble or obscure or as public as it might be, you're getting closer to what Jesus means by a servant acting in love; do it to the glory of God. John's Gospel shows us a dirty task as appropriate for a true servant; it's all in the attitude.

Two stories of servanthood.

Brother Lawrence was a man of humble beginnings who discovered the greatest secret of living in the kingdom of God here on earth: the art of, quote: "practicing the presence of God in one single act that does not end." Brother Lawrence often stated that, it is God who paints Himself in the depths of our soul. We must open our hearts to receive Him and His loving presence.

The Practice of the Presence of God is a book of collected teachings of Brother Lawrence (born Nicolas Herman), a 17th-century Carmelite friar, compiled by Father Joseph de Beaufort. The compilation includes letters, as well as records of his conversations kept by Brother Lawrence's interviewers. The basic theme of the book is the development of an awareness of the presence of God in peeling potatoes, or other everyday tasks.

For centuries this unparalleled classic, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, has given both blessing and instruction to those who can be content with nothing less than knowing God in all His majesty and feeling His loving presence throughout each day.

Jackie Pullinger came from England to Hong Kong over 50 years ago. She had a 10-pound note, like a \$20 bill, and the address of her mother's godson who was a police officer. Jackie had studied music and Oboe in England and found work teaching music. She started sharing the love of Jesus Christ with gangsters and the poor in the Kowloon Walled City. Jackie began to see them set-free from drug addiction and start new lives. Today, many of the people who met Jesus and came off drugs in Hong Kong have gone to other countries in Asia to share what Jesus has done.

In 1981, Jackie Pullinger started a charity called the St Stephen's Society. St Stephen's Society exists to preach the gospel, reach the poor and see people set free through faith in Jesus Christ. Through the St Stephen's Society, Jackie Pullinger and her teams have provided rehabilitation homes for recovering drug addicts, prostitutes, and gang members. By December 2007 it housed 200 people.^[5] The charity's work was recognized by the Hong Kong government who donated the land for the rehabilitation homes.^[4]

The St. Stephen's Society website says, "We are still dealing with all kinds of addictions. We have several homes where those with such problems can come, meet Jesus, be set free and healed, and learn what it is to follow Him."

Jackie's vision: "Our heart is not that they stay and live with us, but that once they have tasted of God's sweetness, they will go to the ends of the earth to share what they have tasted. So now, we have those who have gone out from here, live in the poorest countries of Asia and the Indian Subcontinent and share the Gospel with those who have not yet heard." <http://www.ststephenssociety.com/en/p1.php>

What practice of God's presence could you engage in? What love of Jesus and love of our neighbour, could you put into action, for just one person this weekend? If you say, I'm pretty good at serving others, does that include those who might have the 'dirtiest feet'?

Holy God, source of all love, thank you for Jackie Pullinger, for the St Stephen's Society, for Brother Lawrence and his book, for the couple who have cared for the most vulnerable, for all those engaging in ministry in our community, especially during this pandemic, following your son's teaching to love one another, remaining vigilant in public health protocols. On the night of his betrayal, write Jesus' commandment in our hearts, and give us the will to serve others as he was servant of all, your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen