

## **Touching**

*Exodus 12<sup>1-14</sup>; Psalm 116<sup>1,10-end</sup>; 1 Corinthians 11<sup>23-26</sup>; John 13<sup>1-17,31b-35</sup>*

*[Jesus] poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. [John 13<sup>5</sup>]*

The traditions surrounding this service are perhaps the most challenging of any service in the year.

- ✠ The emotional roller-coaster of the three services that make up the Triduum take us through the intimacy of the Last Supper, the devastation of Calvary and the Triumph of Easter Day. It is important, if we are to enter into what God did, that we don't rush through these or anticipate the end result: knowing what happens doesn't stop us meditating on how risky God's love was toward us.
- ✠ Normally, as good Anglicans, we will willingly shake someones hand and we may even allow a hug, but we are not generally very tactile. This evening we expose bits of ourselves that aren't normally seen and we allow our feet to be touched, to be washed and to be dried. I confess that I have never had my feet washed, but that as a priest it has been my privilege and duty to copy Jesus' serving his disciples. Touching makes this evening very different - and always the feet (there was only one person who washed his hands in the Gospels - Pontius Pilate).
- ✠ The sharing of bread and wine is something that is also tangible - and we believe that Jesus is still present with us, as he was with the disciples, when we do this in remembrance of Jesus.
- ✠ The betrayal is something that we also understand - we all hope that it wouldn't have been us, but we all know that we are capable of it.
- ✠ As we draw this evening to a close we have the chaos of the stripping of the altar (with the double sense of discomfort because it isn't the altar in Church, the altar we know and love) set in stark contrast to the stillness as we wait in the gloom and darkness as we keep vigil with Jesus in preparation for his trial and death.
- ✠ We anticipate gathering tomorrow and in a stark service at 0800 here the story of the crucifixion and, as by tradition no sacraments are valid on Good Friday, we receive the bread only that we will have reserved from this Eucharist. There will be no blessing until the story comes to its conclusion.
- ✠ The Stations of the Cross keep our focus on God's work in the way to the cross.

It is good to be urged beyond our own comfort-zone; doing so opens up the opportunities to learn more about God and ourselves and the possibilities that, uniquely, that partnership brings.

Yet it is the new mandate (*novum mandatum*) where the greatest challenge is found and where we move so far beyond our comfort zone that it doesn't exist any more. **I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.**

The command to love is a high-enough bar, but then it raised further still: **just as I have loved you.....** This moves us from any view that Easter is done for us, but to a costly participation in the life, death and new life in Jesus.

- ✠ **As I have loved you** doesn't mean a soft love that indulges the worst in people, but it does mean a robust love that brings out the best in people.
- ✠ **As I have loved you** doesn't mean we abandon all reason and act irrationally, but it does mean we see people others through God's eyes and act as he would.
- ✠ **As I have loved you** doesn't mean we can expect that our love is appreciated or reciprocated (ask God about that), but it does mean that God sees and God knows - it is for his honour and not for our recognition that we obey the new mandate..

Unlike all the touching that we indulge in for this service only, the love isn't over and done in an evening (even a long one like this) but is an ongoing challenge that doesn't let up.