

## Sermon for Maundy Thursday

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Grace Church in Scarborough

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“Come for Supper!”

The first time this was said to me I was surprised. In my family of origin nobody ever came for supper. No one ever got invited. We never went out. (So I come by inhospitability honestly) My friends who asked me for supper had grown up in a more normal home. I turned up, utterly unaware of what to expect. We sat down with his family and a couple of other guests who I knew. “Why are we doing this?” I was wondering. Sociable eating for me was a hot-dog stand, or fish-and-chips on the way home from the pub, eaten perched on a low wall in the cold air of the night. The next time my friend and I met I had a funny sense of knowing him better. I had a feeling about who he was at a deeper level, where he came from and where he might be going. It was never spoken of, but somehow the meal at his house unfolded something.

I know now why Jesus gathered with his disciples, one last time for one special meal. This was a chance for him to show who he really was. It was also a moment to show them who they could become. It was a time for some of the deep truths about the community of what we now call Church to be unfolded.

Three things happened at this meal.

Jesus realised how close he was to God, so he washed everyone’s feet

Jesus knew he would die, so he told them how to live in love.

Judas left early to betrayed him, and Jesus knew

The first thing is when John says that Jesus, knowing that he came from God and would return to God, and the Father had given all things in to his hands, choses to do something. He doesn’t say, “Hey! I just finally got it! I now know how close I am to God!” Which is what I would say if I finally let that truth sink right in. No. Jesus, quietly and without fuss takes the role of a low-grade servant washing a collection of dusty, dirty feet. This is like coming home and finding your boss vacuuming your carpets. More so. It is as if Jesus knows his own worth in God’s eyes and so he has nothing invested in marking his worth in the world’s eyes. He doesn’t care how stupid, or low on the ladder he looks. His dignity and his worth reside in his relationship with God, and there alone.

The second thing is what he needs to point out to them if they are to be his disciples, people under discipline, people who walk in his footsteps. They need to love each other. He says nothing about orthodoxy, the Anglican Church of Canada, Sunday worship or anything about “doing” or “identity”. He asks them to love each other. Love is the defining quality of this community.

Thirdly, Judas is twitching and Jesus, no fool, can read what is going on in his heart just by watching. He shares a piece of bread with him, dipped in oil. This is a sign of fellowship, of shared food, shared community. Jesus affirms this. The he says to Judas, “Do what you have to do quickly.” It is as if Judas is on a knife-edge and Jesus gives him permission, even direction, to follow through. It is a moment of intimacy, quite without judgment, condemnation or hostility. It is tender. It is loving.

No one asks what “Love” means. He has just shown them. Foot washing...We are pretty good at having mastered the idea that love is doing the unpleasant stuff for people. Child-care, dishwashing, laundry,

earning a paycheck. In church it is about putting out the tables for a meal or cleaning up afterwards. It can be any number of things which we would rather not do, but we do because we have chosen to act out of love.

Foot washing is not just a teaching about how we are supposed to put ourselves second, or last. It does not spring from an "ought to". Rather it springs from this.....Knowing you are loved by God, that you have come from God and will return to God. In this *knowledge* is your dignity, your worthiness, your truth. So nothing is ever beneath you or above you. You are *free* to serve or rule. It matters not.

Then Jesus also showed everyone his relationship with Judas. He had every reason to hate Judas, to call everyone else down on him. He could have been cold to him, hard-eyed. But he loved Judas. He shared food and helped him do the thing he dreaded doing. No judging, no blaming, no name-calling, no retaliation, no threat of Hell-fire. Just love. You are *free* to love, even if love is returned as betrayal.

Christianity is not a matter of belief, it is not a religious system. Christianity is a relationship with God, who we get to know through Jesus. It is a matter of knowing that God loves you, really knowing. In your boots and bones knowing.

And the response to being so utterly, indestructibly loved, is to love others as you are loved. To forgive, as you are forgiven; to refrain from judging, as you have not been judged; to go the extra distance, as Christ went the distance for you.

It is hard to go to supper with Jesus. There are things about this family that we may not be ready to embrace. But Jesus uses this meal to give himself to you even if you are not ready to get right on board just yet. He offers you himself, to come within you, to be part of your soul and body and life.

Christianity is also a willingness to begin with God and let the deep truths sink slowly in, over a lifetime.

Today we celebrate the Eucharist. We are offered the gifts of God for the people of God. Bread, wine and love. And all, it would seem, are welcome to receive.

Because we are loved.