

## **A Podcast for North Coventry Group – April 9 2020 (Maundy Thursday)**

Hello and welcome to a podcast for and from the North Coventry Group of United Reformed Churches. We are making a pilgrimage through Holy Week, an online one - as we cannot meet in our churches. In each short podcast we begin and end with some music, reflect in a number of ways on Holy Week scripture, and pray. Details of music and sources are in the online transcript. Our scripture is all taken from John's Gospel.

**Music\*** – *God so loved the world...*, from *The Crucifixion* by John Stainer (beginning)

### **Scripture†: John 13.1-17**

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

<sup>2</sup>The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. <sup>3</sup>Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; <sup>4</sup>so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel round his waist. <sup>5</sup>After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped round him.

<sup>6</sup>He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?'

<sup>7</sup>Jesus replied, 'You do not realise now what I am doing, but later you will understand.'

<sup>8</sup>'No,' said Peter, 'you shall never wash my feet.'

Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.'

<sup>9</sup>'Then, Lord,' Simon Peter replied, 'not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!'

<sup>10</sup>Jesus answered, 'Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.' <sup>11</sup>For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

<sup>12</sup>When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. 'Do you understand what I have done for you?' he asked them. <sup>13</sup>'You call me "Teacher" and "Lord", and rightly so, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup>Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup>I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. <sup>16</sup>Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup>Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

### **Reflection**

My feet, it has to be said, are not a pretty sight. The same goes for my wife's. Erica and I usually share a smile when we sing the line of the hymn that goes, "Take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for thee". The bad news for our children is that some of their inherited genes involved the feet.

Foot washing – must have been a fairly unpleasant task for a servant. You can imagine the guest arriving in the house. The servant is summoned by the master of the house and told to wash the new arrival's feet. The master then continues the conversation over the servant's head. Good journey? How are the roads today? Bit of a hold-up in Bethany? You should have come round by the Mount of Olives!

Not a pleasant service to perform – but transferred to this situation in the upstairs room it is a symbol of the willingness of Jesus to go all the way. To serve until it hurt. They would have felt it was an odd thing to do after a celebratory meal, but Jesus needed to make this demonstration.

What were *they* – the disciples - thinking? Part of this chapter in John's Gospel which we used in a previous podcast tells of Jesus identifying Judas as his betrayer, and Judas then slipping out, although the other disciples apparently think that he has just gone to buy something, or else to give to the poor.

Judas had brought with him his guilty secret. The other disciples had brought with them their old attitudes, and Jesus took one last opportunity to change them. Or at least to teach them. They get a lot of teaching in the following pages. This is chapter 13; it's not till chapter 18 that Jesus is arrested.

But as far as John is concerned, the central event of the meal that night, as they celebrated Passover together, was this washing of the feet. Jesus was encouraging them not just to a commemoration but to an **activity**. He interpreted it for them in the New Commandment – Love one another as I have loved you. Love one another not *just as much* as I have loved you, but *in the way* that I have loved you.

And of course, despite the joking about feet and despite knowing that we do remember Jesus as he asked us to in our communion services, we would do well to look at this again each year and ask, what is the fresh meaning of this command to service?

This year's context is very odd indeed when for so many of us, loving and serving one another means keeping our distance, avoiding touch. Our new minister, my new colleague Debbie is beginning her time in Coventry without being able to greet folk at the church door, meet groups of Elders and members, even get to know her own neighbours.

We do not get to choose the era in which we are called to serve. Whatever the threat hanging over us now, it is nothing to the threat hanging over Jesus as he met and ate with his disciples one last time. May we learn from him the resilience we need to work in our time with our resources, facing our challenges.

### **Prayers, punctuated by 'O Lord, hear my prayer', a Taizé chant**

*[O Lord, hear my prayer; O Lord, hear my prayer;  
when I call, answer me!  
O Lord, hear my prayer; O Lord, hear my prayer;  
come and listen to me.]*

O Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for those whose service has been called on in these difficult days – for doctors, nurses, other hospital workers and all support and supply staff. We pray for those who have answered a call to return to work from leave or from retirement. We thank you for their dedication and commitment.

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We pray for those other workers, public and private, whose continuing service under changed conditions in and out of work means that we can still have light and heat, water and power when we need it and can communicate through so many different media. We thank you for the persistence and ingenuity of those bringing their skills and resources to

meet new challenges as medical supplies are invented and manufactured in unexpected places.

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We pray for those who want to serve but whose service is constrained or curtailed. For those whose normal roles would have them out and about, meeting people, sharing handshakes or hugs that are now forbidden. Those who would be the footwashers of our society if they could, showing how far service can go, giving of themselves. We thank you for gifts of patience and restraint and pray for inspiration to plan how we optimise the eventual return to a better world for which we all yearn.

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We pray for families – grandparents, parents, children. For those juggling working and schooling in the home. For those with homes inadequate to the task. We pray for those frustrated by rules. Rules that forbid family get-togethers at special times or any time. Rules that suppress full enjoyment of sunshine and fresh air.

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And Lord, hear our prayer for all those who are thinking on your Son today, his preparation of his disciples for service, the last night before his death. Perhaps a night of calm for us but for him a night in which he became a focus for hate and a scapegoat for sin. Our sin. Help us to hear your call and to respond through our service to the willing sacrifice of your Son.

In his name we pray.  
Amen

**Music – *God so loved the world...*, from *The Crucifixion* by John Stainer (conclusion)**

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\* All music included in this podcast is made available for download under the terms of the PRS for Music Limited Online Music Licence number LE-0019067. Stainer piece by St Michael Singers, Taizé chant from the album *Simply Taizé*.

† Bible quotations are all taken from the New International Version, Anglicised Edition.