

Homily for **Maundy Thursday**, 14 April 2022

Evening Holy Communion, St Andrew's, Newcastle upon Tyne

John 13.1-17, 31-35

May my words and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to the Lord, our Strength, and our Redeemer, Amen.

We live in extraordinarily strange and turbulent times. The national lockdown might seem a distant memory; the full easing of movement restrictions and near complete removal of Covid precautionary measures and at the same time, rising rates of infections, mean that life has returned to 'normal'. Especially if you're travelling by public transport! Covid? What Covid?!

For the past two years, it must have felt rather surreal at times: during the first lockdown, streets were quiet and almost empty, and we could hear the birds singing. By the time of the third lockdown, motorways, roads, and streets were no longer quiet or empty, and we could hardly hear the birds singing.

Throughout this time, we have often been confused by the shifting goal posts in political decision making. The Conservative Government's messy record of handling this human crisis will be assessed by academics, ordinary citizens, politicians of other persuasions, and even theologians, in the years to come.

Some of you will already feel and think that the language used during the pandemic has been premature (or immature!) and wholly inappropriate. Invoking even wartime Churchillian-type rhetoric, we heard the ill-thought-through language of 'fight' and 'battle', not to say the risible use of 'world-beating', 'oven-ready' (referring to the Brexit deal), and 'world-class' (referring to our educational system). 'Game-changer' has also been used.

Meanwhile the problems within our society and the wider world have not gone away. If only ... In fact, crises (some bordering on genocide) have deepened in many parts of the world! A year ago, we had Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Eritrea, northern Mozambique, Myanmar, Xinjiang Province. Today, there is war in Ukraine: destruction, death, displacement!

Our world situation is now compounded by food and fuel shortage, supply chain problems, rising inflation; asylum-seekers to Rwanda!!! to name a few!

New English Bible; He had always loved his own who were in the world, and now he was to show **the full extent of his love.**

May we be reminded this evening that to counter the language of ‘fight’ and ‘battle’, we need the language of love. Sacrificial love through the example of Jesus. As we strive to remain ‘clean’ – both physically and metaphorically – we cannot turn away from the dirt and messy business of our world.

34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

David Ford (2021): “Love like Jesus – Utterly, Intimately, Vulnerably, Mutually”

John 13:1-17, 31-35 New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

13 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. **2** The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper **3** Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, **4** got up from the table,^[a] took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. **5** Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. **6** He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, ‘Lord, are you going to wash my feet?’ **7** Jesus answered, ‘You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.’ **8** Peter said to him, ‘You will never wash my feet.’ Jesus answered, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.’ **9** Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!’ **10** Jesus said to him, ‘One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet,^[b] but is entirely clean. And you^[c] are clean, though not all of you.’ **11** For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, ‘Not all of you are clean.’

12 After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you?’ **13** You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. **14** So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. **15** For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. **16** Very truly, I tell you, servants^[d] are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. **17** If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

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31 When he had gone out, Jesus said, ‘Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. **32** If God has been glorified in him,^[j] God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. **33** Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, “Where I am going, you cannot come.” **34** 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.’