

**22 Nov – Southover – lead and preach and record for Trinity –  
(Christ the King)**

This morning in our reading from the beginning of chapter 13 of the Gospel of John the countdown that Jesus knows is happening, begins to speed up. If you remember, the beginning of chapter 12 began with ‘six days before the Passover’. Today our reading begins, ‘it was just before the Passover Feast’. The meal that they are sitting down to is probably the Passover Feast itself. This passage marks the beginning of a major new section in this gospel. Another feast, another phase of Jesus ministry. The hour has come and we are building a sense of climax as Jesus ministry turns inwards to his own disciples and onwards to his death.

This reading from John is often the main Maundy Thursday reading, the one which may precede washing of feet and going out silently into the night leaving you with the dark night of waiting for Good Friday. Instead we are reading it on a day when as the Sunday before Advent we celebrate Christ the King. So I have chosen the Christ the King reading for today from Revelation to contrast with the Christ the servant from our John reading. I believe that this contrast will give us both a model and a hope.

My first point from our John reading is that Jesus knows who he is and what he is doing. He is in command of the situation.

In verse one of our John passage he says:

‘Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father.’

In verse three he says:

‘Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God.’

In verse eleven it says:

‘For he knew who was to betray him.’

Jesus knows who he is, that he is Teacher and Lord. But also that he is a King. That he has come from heaven and will return to heaven and we have that amazing picture from our Revelation passage of Jesus return.

Jesus knows that the time that he has been telling his disciples about is now upon him. It is time for him to die. And his death is a pivot point in history, as three days later he rises from the dead at the resurrection. Jesus’ death was also echoed hundreds of years before in words from the Old Testament, in the suffering servant songs in Isaiah and in the Psalms.

It is also a pivot point in our faith, Jesus is so much more than a good man who told good stories and is a good moral example to us. He was prepared to die, for us.

So my second point is that Jesus knows he is an upside down King

Jesus is a King who was born in obscurity in a stable, who washed peoples feet, who ate with ordinary people, he owned no home and he died a criminals death after an unjust trial.

He is a King who sacrifices himself for us.

Jesus is a King in the midst of us. He doesn't lead from the back, but goes forward calmly with us, ready to listen to us, ready to carry us.

Jesus is a King of truth and integrity. He doesn't say one thing and do another. He doesn't make promises he has no intention of keeping. He is not power hungry, selfish, misguided or evil. He is wise, he is merciful, he is truth.

Jesus is an upside down King. Not served but servant. Not wearing a crown of gold but a crown of thorns. Not sat on a throne, but hung on a cross.

And if Christ is our King what are we supposed to be like?

And so we turn to the end of our gospel reading where Jesus turns his attention to us with:

'if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them.

If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them'.

Point three: Jesus knows that he is the model for us.

Jesus knows that he is about to be betrayed yet this knowledge did not turn him to resentment and bitterness. It made him love more. He met disloyalty with humility.

Jesus is also under pressure. Under pressure his character shows his love.

What does our character show under pressure?

I actually find this very challenging. There is a lot of pressure around at the moment and I suspect many of us are feeling it.

Here is our model and our hope.

What comes out of us when we are squeezed? When we are under pressure?

It is anger or frustration? Resentment or bitterness?

Is it mean words or dishonesty?

Is it love and deep joy? Compassion and forgiveness?

Wisdom and mercy? Is it gentleness and self control.

Jesus knows that it is not as easy and we have a beautiful gospel story here which reveals Jesus character and perfectly shows his love. And he models how we should love.

So relax and listen again to the message he is giving us:

It's at an evening meal and Jesus gets up from the table with his disciples, takes off his outer clothing and wraps a towel around his waist.

And he begins to wash the disciples feet.

And their feet would have been dusty from walking the roads in sandals. They would be hardened by walking and working. The nails would have been bent and dirty. Maybe there would be scratches or blisters and old scars.

And Jesus kneels and gently washes their dusty feet.

This is a menial task but an important task normally taken by a servant. Proper etiquette taught that guests should on arrival have their feet washed by a servant. But here the disciples have sat down to eat without their feet being washed.

The disciples could have washed each others feet, why didn't they? Was it because they had so recently been arguing about who was the greatest. So much so that not one of them was prepared to wash another's feet because it wasn't their job and it would be really odd and awkward to do.

And I do get this, I have found foot washing really odd and difficult yet moving in the past. Once service some time ago we were making a picture with our foot prints. You took a shoe off and made the print then washed and dried your foot before putting your shoes back on. There were however some members of the congregation who wanted to join in but for whom although standing in the paint and making the footprint was fine, washing the paint off their feet was not so easy. So I found myself with a towel and a washing up bowl kneeling washing paint off feet. And it was really odd and difficult yet moving.

And so Jesus here gives us in the story a lesson in humility. Also an example of selfless service.

Jesus knows all the things about who he is and what is about to happen that we have heard about. Jesus knows that he is about to leave them. Jesus knows that he has come from God and is returning to God. He knows that one in the room will betray him. He knows that all will scatter as he is arrested. He knows that one will deny him three times within hours.

But despite or maybe because of all he knows he humbly kneels and gently washes their feet.

Peter, I love Peter, he doesn't understand. Characteristically No he says, you shall never wash my feet! And then as Jesus explains he says then wash all of me! Peter so enthusiastic and eager gets some things so right and some so wrong.

Yet Jesus knows him and loves him and gently washes his feet.

And the disciples they don't understand that Jesus is about to leave them, to suffer, to die and to rise again. That this is the beginning of some dark and confusing days. So Jesus just tells them to love one another as he has loved them and he shows them how.

Jesus lovingly kneels and gently washes their feet

And the model here is one of love and kindness and a calling to be gentle.

### Be gentle to yourself.

Take some time for yourself in the busy run up to Christmas. Do something you love. Do something that energises you and makes you smile. Allow Jesus to bind your wounds and hurts of the last months. Accept His loving kindness.

Be gentle to yourself, let Jesus wash your feet.

### Be gentle to others.

There is a big world out there and it's full of people who continue to be nervous and afraid. I think that it is still true that many people are still one critical word away from tears or anger.

Your new Rector Anita will be licensed tomorrow. This is very exciting. It is a new chapter in your churches and it is a new chapter for Anita and her family. You will I know welcome her well. You will have many hopes and plans and expectations. Be gentle. To yourselves, as a community and to Anita.

Be gentle to others, take your loving service and help Jesus wash their feet.

Be gentle with your relationship with Jesus.

Pray as you can, in ways that work for you. In the quiet, walking outside, in the church, with words and pictures and in silence and music. And surround yourself with God's word and things that encourage you. And look for clues that point to God and share them with those you meet.

And Be hopeful – when, not if it all gets too much remember that we have a big God, that Jesus is King of the whole world but yet he also cares for and knows each one of us personally.

Christ the King: Christ the servant. A model and a hope.

To finish I am going to take some very familiar words of a song for us to use as a prayer:

*From heaven you came helpless babe  
Entered our world, your glory veiled  
Not to be served but to serve  
And give Your life that we might live*

*There in the garden of tears  
My heavy load He chose to bear  
His heart with sorrow was torn  
'Yet not My will but Yours, ' He said*

*Come see His hands and His feet  
The scars that speak of sacrifice  
Hands that flung stars into space  
To cruel nails surrendered*

*So let us learn how to serve  
And in our lives enthrone Him  
Each other's needs to prefer  
For it is Christ we're serving*

*This is our God, the Servant King  
He calls us now to follow Him  
To bring our lives as a daily offering  
Of worship to the Servant King*

**Amen**