

GOSPEL READING: John 13.1-17, 31b-35

Praise to you, O Christ, King of Eternal Glory

I give you a new commandment, says the Lord:

Love one another as I have loved you.

Praise to you, O Christ, King of Eternal Glory.

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

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. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 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. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' Jesus said to him, 'One who has bathed does not need to

wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.' For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'

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? You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So 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.

Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 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." 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.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

One Maundy Thursday years ago, I saw an elderly priest kneel down and wash the smelly feet of a teenage boy, and I thought if being ordained might look like this, I think I might want in after all! Knowing the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet, and seeing it acted out right in front of me were two completely different things. That experience changed me.

Over these three very significant days, you will see, hear, and experience the story of the end of Jesus' life, and his resurrection. You will encounter rich symbolism and profound drama. It may very well affect your emotions. You may find that Holy Spirit connects with you deeply, in ways that change you.

At the end of this service, the church is stripped bare and darkness closes in. You will hear ancient and powerful words of desolation. The church will gradually become more tomblike. The sacrament will be placed on the altar in a symbolic garden as we watch and pray with Jesus in Gethsemane. And when tomorrow ends, all will seem lost. We remember Jesus, taken down from the cross and placed in a tomb, with the light blocked out and no-one to tend to him.

With this in mind, I'd like us to hear from someone who was there, long ago. Mary Magdalen. She was the first to see the risen Jesus, and that is often what we focus on. But what wisdom might her story offer us this evening? Let's listen to her voice.

The darkness of my mind was like the darkness of the tomb. The light had gone. Hope was lost. Love was dead. The one who had healed me, restored me, and given me life was killed by men. I thought they could take nothing else from me. But those men still held power. And for a whole day I couldn't even go to him because of their religious rules. It was unbearable, thinking of Jesus in darkness and alone.

As soon as I could, at the crack of dawn, I went. And I thought they had robbed me further, taken his body. I was beside myself with grief. I could barely see through my tears. I wasn't alone in the tomb, but there was no Jesus. Then I heard a question: "Why are you crying"? Why did I have to explain? Wasn't it obvious?

Outside, my vision still blurred by tears and bright sunlight, I heard the same question. "Why are you crying?" And for the second time I gave an answer.

And then... Then I heard him speak my name: Mary.

Rabboni; teacher!

In that one moment everything changed. He was there in front of me!

He had never been alone. God's Spirit had been brooding over his body: loving; nurturing; breathing life.

It might seem strange but his tomb wasn't a tomb. It was a womb. Of course I couldn't be there. New life had been growing in secret and darkness,

nurtured by God's spirit, and had come to birth. And I saw that new life. I saw the resurrected Jesus.

And I realised that at the very beginning of time, all that was dark and empty was held in God's womb; expectant, creative, nurturing. All that is was yet to be. And in time it was born.

And I understood that the total darkness we sometimes experience; the desolation, grief and loss; is filled with the very breath of God, and in time new life and love might be born in us.

SCARF OFF

So tonight, as we experience the darkness and desolation of this time; remember that there is no place where

the expectant life-giving Spirit of God is absent. Our human darkness is held in divine love.

The Lord is here.
His Spirit is with us.