

Maundy Thursday 28 March 2024 St. Brandon's

1 Cor 11: 23-26; John 13: 1-17, 31b-37

We've had a rich, inspiring, challenging week of homilies based on Mark's gospel, thanks to Gael, Alison and Colin, so it's a bit of a challenge to preach on Maundy Thursday!

But this evening we're not in Mark, but with John, who recounts the incident which we will re-enact here in a just a moment.

So I want you to take off your '**Mark**' spectacles, the chronological, sharply-focussed, starkly clear view of these final days before the crucifixion, and instead to put on your **John** glasses, with their 3D sound, HD vision and careful, deliberate selection and arrangement of events as John, writing some years later, seeks to convince and persuade us of the truth of who Jesus is.

It was as I did this 'glasses swop' several days ago that I was struck afresh, in that way the Bible has when you're reading a familiar passage, thinking you know it well. *Kerpow!*

Water jars! And the phrase very near the start, *Jesus knew that his hour had come...*

Perhaps you're ahead of me – I think you often are.

Back in John chapter 2, the opening scene of his gospel, following immediately from his powerful prologue about Jesus the Word of God, John took us to Cana, not too far from Nazareth in Galilee, where Jesus and his friends went to a wedding - you know the story. When, during the meal and celebrations, Jesus was asked by his mother to help in the tricky situation of a wine shortage, he said 'My hour has not yet come'. But out of love for Mary, or compassion for the hosts, or wanting discreetly to ensure the party was not ruined – we don't know- he asked the servants to refill the stone water jars, which would have been used already for foot washing as the guests arrived.

Six huge jars there were, holding gallons each, plenty of water, all of which Jesus changes to new wine. And that's how John begins his account of Jesus' earthly ministry- telling us that this is the first sign, the first miracle, and his disciples believed in him.

John follows this story with his account of Jesus going to Jerusalem for the Passover and cleansing the Temple – driving out the money changers – the incident we read on Tuesday because in Mark, as in Matthew and Luke, it's part of the final week of Jesus' life. There's something going on here, both in Jesus' actions and in John's account of them, something about making things clean, and making things new...

But for the moment, lets hold the image of Jesus in Cana, **the water into wine Messiah**, miracle maker, joy bringer, as we fast forward to Chapter 13, tonight's gospel.

First, John sets the scene – he's a great story teller.

It's just before the Passover (again) and *Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father* – just as Jesus knew back in chapter 2 that his hour had *not yet come*.

And, says John, as the summary of this story,

Having loved his own who were in the world, Jesus loved them to the end.

Everything that follows demonstrates Christ's love, which is uncomfortable and challenging, yet unconditional and never-ending. *Jesus loved them to the end.*

Jesus acts intentionally, just as he did in Cana, and those stone water jars play their part again. Did he, I wonder, remember that other, *first* celebration with his friends, and how he called the servants and gave his instructions?

This time Jesus is not master, but servant, the slave, serving his friends, teaching them what love really means through every action.

So he takes off his guest's robe, attaches the towel to his belt, the soon to be damp, dirt- smeared cloth which he carries to enable each one to have those clean feet which stand for so much else. And Jesus takes the water from the huge jars, pours it into a basin and washes their feet. John was there, and he remembers every detail.

It is deeply uncomfortable to see their Lord and Master behave in this way, to allow him to wash them.

As Peter protests, Jesus explains that it must be like this- '*Unless I wash you, you have no share in me*'.

The outward sign stands for the inner truth, that they, that we, need Christ's forgiveness and cleansing to become a part of his body, part of his new kingdom.

And as Jesus washes them, the everyday water from the everyday jars changes, to become the life-giving water of Christ's love, poured out to bring forgiveness and freedom, life in all its fullness, for eternity.

Those disciples didn't understand it then, they were too full of embarrassment and shock, but in time they did, and John recalled this Last Supper Jesus, who taught them how to love.

Jesus loved them to the end.

John gives us these two scenes – the first meal together and the last, with two pictures of Jesus the Messiah, God and man.

In Cana we meet the water into wine miracle maker, transforming, renewing, sharing his new kingdom in the taste of new wine.

And here in Jerusalem tonight, in the Saviour's hands the water is changed again, for the king becomes the slave, and teaches his friends how to love.

In just a few hours, the Messiah will be rejected and mocked, whipped and scourged. His human thirst for fresh water will be quenched only with sour wine,

And as he finally gives up his life in an agonising death, from his side will flow blood and water.

Christ's blood is both the seal of God's new covenant with his people, and the new wine of the kingdom. And the water is both for the purification and forgiveness of the whole world, and the living water of eternal life.

This is our Saviour, our servant king, who calls us also to share with him at table, as he did his first disciples.

Jesus loved them, Jesus loved us, to the end.