

# A Meditation for Maundy Thursday

📖 **Read: John 13.1-17, 31 - 35**

We've come to the last supper. John's Gospel has a large section on the Last Supper and has a series of actions and discourses that gets behind the ministry of Jesus. Its shot through with symbolism and meaning.



In Jerusalem the traditional site of the Last Supper is above the place where King David is traditionally believed to be buried. You get the slightly strange situation that upstairs you have crowds looking at the scene of the Last Supper and down below you have Orthodox Jews praying at the supposed site of King David's tomb. I must admit that I am sceptical on both counts but one thing it shows is the difference between the way of David and the way of Jesus.

David was the great King of Israel – the forerunner of the Messiah and the one to whom many looked to as the archetype of a future Messiah. But when you start to look at him then you see that he shed much blood and that he was into expansion and power. When you look at Jesus you see a man of peace and humility. There is a contrast between the power and might of David and the humility and servanthood of Jesus.

Nowhere do we see this better than in Jesus washing his disciple's feet.

*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."*

Interestingly, Jesus washes all his disciples feet. Including those of Judas.

As a child running around barefoot in dusty heat of summer, I remember my feet getting incredibly filthy! It would take ages to clean them. It was ingrained. It was copious.

In Jesus' day it would also often be filthy given the animals that would have clogged the roads.

It was the role of the lowest servant to wash the feet of guests. Understandable given the filth. So, Jesus coming and washing His disciple's feet was an outrage.

The disciples expected their Messiah to be a David and instead they got a house slave.

What would this mean for them if their Lord behaved like this?

Peter, being Peter protests!

*I love this picture by Ford Maddox Brown with a grumpy Peter begrudgingly indulging Jesus kneeling at his feet.*

Jesus replies that they won't understand yet, but they will.

We often don't understand that we have to let Jesus serve us before we learn to serve Him.

But Peter wants more.

*"Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"*

As William Temple said,

*"It is loyalty that speaks, and generosity, but it is not faith; for the one thing Peter cannot do is leave the Lord alone to act as he pleases; the loyalty and the generosity are infected with self-will"*

So, the washing of the disciples feet challenges us. It is not only that we need to learn to serve others rather than look to our own role. It is also that we need to let Jesus serve us and wash our feet.

To let Him serve us as He wishes rather than as we wish. To let Him be, rather than our shaping of what Jesus should be like and do.

Jesus challenges His disciples to be like Him. To serve like Him. To be served by Him.

Like Peter we struggle with that.

### **A Prayer to conclude:**

**Lord Jesus Christ,  
you have taught us  
that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters  
we do also for you:  
give us the will to be the servant of others  
as you were the servant of all,  
and gave up your life and died for us,  
but are alive and reign, now and for ever.  
Amen.**

