



St. Stephen's Parish Church  
St. Stephen's Road  
Hightown  
L38 0BL

- *integral to community life*
- *welcoming and joyful in worship*
- *inspiring and loving in our ministry to children*

Hi All,

In the Maundy Thursday service (Thursday 14th April), I take a washing up bowl of warm water, some soap, a large jug of clean water and kneel on the floor and wash 2 or 3 people's feet. That's the theory. In practise, I struggle to find anyone who will let me wash their feet! There's all sorts of excuses: bunions, ugly feet, smelly feet, wearing tights, embarrassing feet, ticklish feet etc etc. And the one or two I can find have spent the hours (I suspect) before the service washing their feet so they are spotlessly clean. Perhaps I should allow someone else to wash my feet - but then again I may have a verruca!



In this service we remember what Jesus did the night before he died. One of the actions is - he washed his disciples feet. In hot countries when people didn't wear shoes or socks, just sandals, and where roads were unmade, people walking around ended up with dusty and probably smelly feet. Before entering your home, especially if you had servants, the lowliest servant would wash your feet.

Jesus was making a point about himself. To quote from John chapter 13: 'When Jesus had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. 'Do you understand what I have done for you?' he asked them. 'You call me "Teacher" and "Lord", and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them'.

I'm wondering why it's difficult to find people willing to have their feet washed. I'm wondering why I would wish to have perfect feet before this happened to me. What is this saying about us? Is it suggesting God can only love us if we are 'perfect'?

Some time ago on Radio 4 there was a short story called, 'Tickles' written by the Irish writer Paul McVeigh (There's a video of him reading this story on YouTube).

'Tickles' is the story of a son visiting his mother in a care home, where she is now resident because of her dementia. She embraces him and will not let him go. He becomes very self-conscious but then she starts to tickle him and his mind goes back to childhood, and how his overworked mother would come in from one of the two jobs she held down, both of which involved long hours stood on her feet, and would tell him to fetch the basin. He remembered how he would wash her feet – and even tickle them – the last time he had been properly intimate with his mother. He remembered the patience and care required to look after her fearfully ugly feet, and the bond that existed between them in this intimate act. The embrace in the care home is finally broken and he talks with a nurse who mentions his mother has been complaining about her feet. He asks her for a basin.

This story helped me see John 13 in a different light. Jesus isn't simply teaching his disciples to serve and be served. He is showing them what love looks like: intimate, compassionate, tactile love.

After the feet were washed Jesus says, 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you.' This is what the son is showing in the Radio 4 story. I hope this year as we hear this story told once again and feet are washed we may know God's love for us which is intimate and compassionate no matter how verruca-ed or ugly our lives are.

Blessings and a Happy Easter,  
Jan - Revd Jan Ashton