

**Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> April: Brother, sister, let me serve you.**

I have a Russian niece who one Christmas gave me this beautiful set of slippers you can hang by the door. In Russia, as in other countries in Europe, it is good hospitality to offer guests arriving at your home a change of footwear from cold, wet or snowy boots to comfy slippers (which presumably are kinder on your floors too). In the Holy Land, as in many Middle-eastern cultures, it is dry and sandy... visitors arrive with hot, dusty feet and it is good hospitality to offer them clean water to wash them; traditionally the job of the household servants or slaves. Yesterday, in following the lectionary, we got a little ahead of ourselves in talking about Jesus' final meal with his friends. Today's reading sets the scene for this meal... and it is brought to us by Hugo.

**Read John 13:1-17**

Have you ever washed someone's feet? It is a tender, intimate thing, working the soap between the toes.....Funny things feet; they are not ugly – but not beautiful – they are functional and walk thousands of miles in a lifetime. I recall the privilege of washing my mother's feet and also church members from across the Benefice at our Passover supper. My memory of having my own feet washed comes from Uganda where my niece payed for me to have a pedicure. A young Ugandan called Willy arrived on a moped. I was embarrassed by the state of my nails, but he quietened me and gently and lovingly washed and manicured them. I sat with tears rolling down my face as I recalled this very reading. He confided that he had been at University, training to be a lawyer, but the breadwinners in his family had died with AIDS and it fell to him to provide for the extended family, so he gave up his studies to do pedicure. 'Are you not frustrated?' I enquired.

"No!" he said emphatically, "because everyday I make people feel happy and special. And one day I will travel to the West and show them a better way to live." His words have stayed with me and often come back in the rush and pressure of our lives before COVID.

*'Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.'*

This act of love and service is a watershed moment; it stands at the end of all his journeying with the 12 and summarises his teaching – words into actions.... And it looks forward to, anticipates, his ultimate love-offering of himself on the cross. Up until now he has been the one leading the action. Thereafter actions will be done to him.

Sometimes, as for Peter in this reading and me with Willy, receiving God's love and compassion is a greater challenge than giving it. We are wired to fight our own battles, to prize our independence... "I can manage!.... I can do it!"

Will we let God love us? Will we receive graciously another's love and service?

In our COVID – lockdown, I am struck by how many of our ‘key workers’ are the servants in our Society, still quietly going about their work: lorry drivers, dustmen and postmen, those on our supermarket tills, shelf stackers and food packers. For every doctor there is an unsung army of cleaners, cooks and hospital porters and technicians. Today, let us receive graciously and consider how we might thank and encourage them; if you know one – write a note, send a message of appreciation like my 3-year old neighbour who left a message out with the bins ‘Thank you, dustmen!’

“Brother, sister, let me serve you,

Let me be as Christ to you,

Pray that I may have the grace

to let you be my servant too.”