

Acts 3 ¹⁹Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus.

John 13 ³Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel round his waist. ⁵After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped round him.

⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?'

⁷Jesus replied, 'You do not realise now what I am doing, but later you will understand.'

⁸'No,' said Peter, 'you shall never wash my feet.'

Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.'

⁹'Then, Lord,' Simon Peter replied, 'not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!'

¹⁰Jesus answered, 'Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.' ¹¹For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

¹²When he 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. ¹³'You call me "Teacher" and "Lord", and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.'

³⁴'A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.'

Last weekend nearly 80 of us had a wonderful time down in Bournemouth and the adults were particularly blessed by the ministry of Steve and Janet Gaukroger with Steve speaking on God's refreshment: daily refreshment for ourselves as individuals, in our family and relationships, in our church life and in our mission. John 13 was one of the passages that Steve referred to in his talk on our church life, but actually it provides a wonderful insight into all those areas which need God's refreshment.

Let's think first about daily personal refreshment. Imagine the scene: the disciples had all day been tramping the dusty streets of Jerusalem and it wasn't just dust. There were donkeys using those streets as well - and camels. And they didn't just walk there, they did everything there – and I mean everything.

And there was rubbish, rotting veg and street children who weren't too fussy what they did or where. This is where the disciples had been walking – so it probably wasn't just dust and sweat on their feet. And now they were about to have a special meal. And this was not going to be like a dinner party in Cholsey. They didn't have any chairs for a start. No, they lay around a low table, possibly on cushions. Just work it out. **Demonstrate.** The person about 3 down from me is going to have my feet very close to his face. So it was pretty important that at least the worst was washed off your feet before you lay down to eat! Washing feet as smelly and mucky as that was not the most pleasant of jobs. So normally it was a job given to the most junior household servant. How extraordinary then that Jesus literally takes on the form of that most junior servant – he strips off and puts a towel around his waist and then says to the disciples *I'm going to be the one who washes your feet.*

The disciples might not have minded some young lad – junior servant -washing their smelly feet, but Jesus! The disciples each had to be willing to let Jesus not only see, but smell and handle and wash the very worst bit of them. That part of them which had accumulated the muck of the day.

For them it was their feet; for us it is our hearts and minds, our thoughts and imaginations.

We may feel reluctant to do this, but John reminds us at the beginning of the chapter how Jesus loved his own to the very end. He washed the feet of Judas even though He knew that Judas was about to betray him. He washed the feet of Peter even though He knew he as about to deny him. He washed the feet of all the other disciples even though He knew that they were about to desert Him.

Just as the disciples had to remove their sandals and pull up their robes to reveal their smelly, filthy feet to Jesus, so today we need to be willing to strip off the mask of respectability and piety and lay before Jesus our dirty hearts and minds, safe in the knowledge that Jesus will not be shocked or turn away, for He already knows the very worst about us and loves us as his own to the very end. We can know that He will take in his hands the very worst part of us of which we might be most ashamed and tenderly wash us clean – it was for this very purpose that He came. But as Steve said, *repentance is the gateway to refreshment.*

Jesus then said: ‘*Do you understand what I have done for you?... 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.*’ This brings us to refreshment of our family and relationships. Steve reminded us that in the time of Jesus, the family was not the nuclear family with 2.4 children but an extended family with grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and one or 2 others who maybe had no blood relatives of their own but just got kind of adopted. *Unc. When I was 10, my Uncle Geoffrey married my wonderful aunt Jean Billington (sugar)...* So Steve really focussed this session on the church family embracing all, whatever their relationships or situation. This is not always easy!

I guess that in time to come the disciples found that there were some feet they really did not want to wash. *Lord do you realise just how smelly and filthy Andrew’s feet are ?!! You can’t really expect me to take hold of those feet and wash them.* And of course the Lord says *Well yes I do – after all, I washed the feet of Judas and I’ve washed your feet as well.*

At least washing someone else’s feet however smelly they are, we can feel a little bit noble when we do it. In fact, the smellier someone else’s feet are, the more of a mess their life is in, the greater the sin into which they have fallen, the **nobler** we can feel when we show them the love and compassion of Jesus!

But Jesus doesn’t just call me to wash the feet of others – He also calls me to let others wash my feet as well. Sometimes that is even harder. To let others see the worst of me and especially when I like to think “*At least my life isn’t in as much of a mess as that other person. Who are they to wash my feet?!*” But Jesus shows as so clearly that all of us need to have our feet washed and He also shows that every single member of our church family is worthy and has the ability to wash my feet. For when I go to help someone who maybe is struggling whether with a particular sin or a relationship or situation, Jesus tells me I need like him to strip off all outward covering, all status, all reputation, all of my virtual self that I like to present to the world and to kneel at their feet as a servant. And when I’m kneeling there, God may very well use that person who I am seeking to help and bless - whose feet I’m washing – to bless me, to show me something of his love or to share with me something of his truth. This is the meaning of *one another – wash one another’s feet.*

I think all of us who heard it were struck by Steve’s illustration of the *five frogs on a log: 4 of them decide to jump off. How many frogs are left on the log? Answer: still 5, because there is all the difference in the world between deciding and doing!* Did you notice that Jesus says something very similar in v.17? “*Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them*”

Steve then talked about God’s refreshment of the church. Jesus doesn’t just give us a wonderful example and loving and serving others and say

It would be lovely if you could possibly learn to do the same... He gives us a commandment – a new commandment: *Love one another, as I have loved you.* If this is the one new commandment that Jesus has given us, then surely it must be one of the most important things that we must seek to do – more important than doctrinal purity, more important than theological understanding, more important than biblical knowledge or spiritual maturity and certainly more important than the type of services that we have, the clothes we wear or the style of our worship.

Not just love one another – but love one another as I have loved you. And how did Jesus love me? He humbled himself, He took on the form of a servant and wrapped himself in the clothing of a household slave and washed my feet. When I feel cross with a brother or sister in Christ, when I know I’m in the right and any *idiot* can see that my brother or sister is so *totally* in the wrong, I need to remember what Jesus has commanded me: *to love my brother, my sister just as Jesus has loved me.* For Jesus is the one person who is always in the right and he has carried on loving me even though I am frequently in the wrong.

Like Jesus, I need to come with complete humility before that person and seek to serve them and bless them. Because it is only when I'm in that place of humble serving – on my knees as it were – that God will be able to bless me. And it may even be by the hand of that brother who I thought was so totally in the wrong.

Finally, Steve spoke about refreshment of our mission – and he drew a link between mission and unity. In Jesus' great prayer recorded in John 17 he prays: v.21 *that all of them [who believe through the apostles' message – i.e. us] may be one...so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*

²² *I have given them the glory that you gave me...so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.* In the same way in this passage in John 13 Jesus says ³⁵ *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*' Jesus doesn't just want us to be a blessing to one another, but to be a blessing to the world. He wants *everyone to know*; He wants *the world to believe*.

The love we have for one another is a very powerful witness to the world. Nick the manager: *What a genuinely fantastic bunch of people you have got here... they are so friendly and appreciative....*

Then he said: *You should see some of the groups that come here !*

I also received a card yesterday from Margaret Richard's friend Vanessa who joined us: *It was a privilege to get to know your church family and realise what a wonderful bunch of folk you have. All so different, yet all so accepted. Thank you again so much for giving me this special time with you all.*

Just as loving one another can only come from being aware of how much Jesus loves us, so it is with our mission. For just as washing one another's feet is not something that comes easily, nor is sharing our faith. Peter said to Jesus, *Lord I should be washing your feet*, and I am sure that after they had all had their feet washed by Jesus, each disciple would have felt even more strongly that it would be a *privilege* to wash Jesus' feet and to bless him as He had blessed them. The more I am aware of how much Jesus loves me and what He has done for me, the more I am motivated to wash feet and to share faith.

So how do we wash Jesus' feet today? Do you remember what Jesus said in the parable of the sheep and the goats? "*Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?... The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."*" It was this that motivated Mother Teresa. She said *We first meet Jesus in the bread and the wine, but then we meet Him again out on the streets amongst the destitute.*

We don't have many destitute on the streets of Cholsey, but we need to be praying that Jesus will show us *the least of his brothers and sisters* – where the greatest needs are - and out of love for Jesus, love him back by seeking to meet those needs. In fact there are many who are *spiritually* destitute:

Steve said: *Mission is far more than personal salvation but it's not less than personal salvation.* For Jesus, washing his disciples' feet was a symbol of his complete forgiveness. Jesus in his love for us has washed not only our feet but made us clean all over; may the longing of our hearts be that as we in gratitude wash the feet of Jesus by washing the feet of others, they discover the joy of being washed completely clean by the grace and love and forgiveness of Jesus. Amen.