

Maundy Thursday
28th March
Father Tim

I once attended a men's weekend at Church, it was my first one ever. I didn't know what to expect. To my horror one of the leaders who worked in the corporate world, asked us to go outside a form what he called flying V, the shape geese make when they fly in formation, we were to flap our arms and pretend to be geese in the conference centre open space!

In tonight's well known story of Jesus washing his disciples feet I have read that that this is akin to a team building exercise for the disciples, trying to help them forge together as they will soon be expected to work together once Jesus ascends to be with the Father. Or do we liken tonight's reading to a lesson of those of high status, say a CEO, being humble enough to say put the chairs away at the end of a meeting. Or maybe like a member of clergy helping out at the bar after a concert, like I enjoyed doing last week at our Messiah concert.

It is tempting to see the application of the foot washing story in this kind of way. And this wouldn't be altogether wrong. I wouldn't wish to boorish and claim that's a load of nonsense and deny that yes the vulnerability that Jesus shows in serving his disciples and in many other stories in the does indeed display a disruption in the understanding of power, the relinquishing of private interests in favour of the interests of the wider community, to abandon of self-centredness and participating in the self-giving nature of the son which goes to the heart of a trinitarian understanding nature of God. But as we enter into these final few days of Holy Week we are keep looking and listening to pay attention to what else this story may be drawing us too. When we read this passage evenings from John we hear of the persistent mention of Jesus' imminent death. Up to this point we have heard Jesus' time had not yet come but this evening we hear our in our opening verse '*Jesus knew that his hour **had** come*'. It tell us that '*He loved them to the **end***'.

Jesus takes off his outer robe - a garment of special interest at the time of crucifixion. At the beginning of Holy Week we hear of another dinner, only a few days before, where Mary disrupts proceedings and washes Jesus feet with her hair, anointing him as King but also his death, she alone through his wholly inappropriate intimate action has begun to prepare Jesus for his body for burial. Perhaps now as Jesus removes his robe, puts on a towel, he also engages in a lesson that is to prepare his disciples also for the cost of discipleship. The Gospel of John, ever rich in symbolism and deep meanings, Jesus tells Peter. "*One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean*". Jesus is referring to baptism - the beginning of discipleship. You don't need to be baptised again Peter

But as Mary washed my feet preparing me for death, so I wash your feet, preparing you for the death you will also face on account of following me . I am preparing you for the full consequence of your baptism. For these first disciples this literally meant death - nails and wood and asphyxiation and agony. Maybe on hearing this we might want to go back to a safer understanding of foot washing. I feel more comfortable with the idea of team building. Can this not just be a lesson helping at the car boot sale. But tonight we are asked to consider the full cost of discipleship

This weeks liturgical text contains the line '*we adore you o Christ and we bless you*'. St. Augustine famously said, "*We imitate whom we adore.*" How do we imitate this Christ whom we adore? The idea of death as part of discipleship may seem very far off, especially in our context. But this evening we remember the many disciples who throughout the years have paid the cost of discipleship. We consider Oscar Romero the archbishop of San Salvador, who after spending time in the countryside and witnessing the semi feudal hardship and misery of the people there, he became their voice, he challenged the lies and coverup, the killings, the torture and the disappearances of community leaders; he demanded justice and recompense for the atrocities committed by the army and police. As time went on Archbishop Romero accepted and prepared himself for death, he knew this was the likely cost of his discipleship. At 6.26pm on March 24th 1980, with a single marksman's bullet, he fell at the foot of a huge crucifix as he celebrated the Eucharist

This is a fairly famous story of martyrdom. But our world contains countless stories that go unnoticed. On a trip to Laos a number of years ago, our church group met a man who was a pastor in the underground church, he was generous hospitable man, who we all remembered after we came home, a number of months later, we heard he had been beaten to death because of his Faith. This is the not nice side of Holy Week. The inconvenient truth of Holy Week - are we willing to pay the cost of Christ like discipleship, if not death, perhaps humiliation, the lose of status, to be the object of scorn, the lose of property? Whatever it is for the sake of devotion to this God who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. So The question tonight is whether we want this: Do we want to be prepared for the cost of discipleship. Jesus knells before us because, like the first disciples, he loves us to the end. Do we want to be prepared for the cost of discipleship? Do we want Jesus? Will we love him to the end?