

Intimate moments

As the storm clouds gather the closer we get to the crucifixion, there are sunlight moments of intimacy scattered through the story of Jesus's last days. A woman breaks into a quiet family lunch to kneel at Jesus's feet, to stroke, anoint and cheer him. Everyone was shocked, surprised – probably even Jesus himself. It can be hard at times to let go of what we expect to happen so that we can allow in special acts of kindness, and the gentleness that warms our souls. Oddly, Pontius Pilate offers Jesus a moment of intimacy on his last day. I think Pilate wanted to let Jesus go. He recognised that there was a good man here, someone who would entertain and inspire him in conversation. I am sure that Pilate would have rather that Jesus disappeared from the crowd, only to appear once again in Pilate's study for a late night chat. Pilate tried – but the power of the crowd blocked him, preventing that moment which would have transformed Pilate's life, no doubt. My hunch is that Jesus knew what Pilate was trying to do. So there was a connection between the two of them, albeit the promise of closeness was too quickly snuffed out.

Perhaps my most treasured moment of intimacy is found in the story of the foot washing, at the Last Supper. This is the story I told Holy Trinity Pewley Down School at their end of term assembly last week. I wanted to convey something of how precious is God's intimate love, how gentle, kind and moving. So I acted out for them how, in my imagination, Jesus washed his disciples feet. First, one disciple was embarrassed – after all, letting someone touch your toes is a very personal matter. Embarrassment can cause us to turn away and miss out on kindness. But Jesus was always a person who inspired courage and confidence in others. He said "Don't be embarrassed; accept the fact that you are lovable". This disciple would have treasured that conversation until her dying days. The second disciple who had her feet washed resisted because she thought herself unworthy. As with most people, we recoil from kindness if we see ourselves as not good enough to receive it. Jesus said: "You don't have to be good, so that I will then love you. It's the other way around. Because I love you, you will aspire to be good". That's right, isn't it? God's love is not the reward for our goodness; rather, it is the stimulus which prompts us to be our better selves.

Then, finally, there was Peter. He is the one who refused to have his feet washed – until Jesus said that pride was blocking this friendship from developing. So Peter, as was usual for him, flipped to the other extreme: “Don’t just wash my feet, but my whole body too”. Jesus shows patience. Peter was an all-or-nothing sort of guy. Jesus says: a small symbol of our closeness is all that is needed to carry you through the next 30 years. That is how Baptism works: one symbol of God’s embracing love is a sign and a token for a lifetime’s continuing care. Peter did not need to be drenched; he simply had to accept the intimacy of Jesus washing his feet.

But perhaps the most moving moment happens on Easter Day itself. The chief disciples have found the empty tomb, and then run away to work out what happens next. Mary is slower to respond, standing quietly in the garden, pondering, wondering. She asks the gardener where the body has gone. Tears, as they so often do, have blocked her from seeing what is in front of her eyes. But Jesus pierces her sadness simply by calling her name: Mary! That has been the experience of countless other disciples over the centuries: in times of troubling sadness or joy, in turmoil or in peace, God calls my name. Listen! Pay attention! Respond!

The last days of Jesus are filled with grand gestures and profound decisions. Yet within these, there are tender moments of intimacy which are life-changing, heart-warming, and inspiring for years to come.

Robert

Good News / Resources

Solar panels are to be fitted to the roof of York Minster in a bid to tackle rising energy bills and reduce carbon emissions. Plans to install 199 solar panels on the roof of the South Quire Aisle were approved by City of York Council and the Cathedrals Fabric Commission and are expected to generate 75,000 kWh (kilowatt hours) of power per year. Read more at

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-york-north-yorkshire-64905283>