

# Thursday

KLIPPIES KRITZINGER

Love is the golden thread that runs through Holy Week, the last week of Jesus' life on earth. Behind all Jesus' actions there was his deep love for God and God's Kingdom, for his disciples, for the crowds of pilgrims in Jerusalem, for the people of Israel, for the whole of humanity. Even his sharp prophetic words against the religious leaders and his harsh prophetic action in the temple were motivated by love: a burning divine love that cares so much for people who are sick, neglected, excluded and exploited that you stand up in public for them, make space for them and risk your life for them – not as an occasional act of charity, but as a way of life, dedicated to building a society that is fair and equal and caring. The love of Jesus revealed in the last week of his life was not sentimental or weak. His love is deeply personal and also widely public; and the public face of love is justice.

The clearest way in which Jesus showed this wide and deep divine love to his disciples in Holy Week was on Thursday evening, when they had the Passover meal together in a borrowed Upper Room. From John chapter 13, which recounts the emotional events of that Thursday evening, I want to highlight two aspects.

## Servant leadership (John 13:1-20)

When Jesus washed his disciples' feet he did the demeaning thing that none of them was willing to do: the lowly work of washing dirt off their feet. He took off his cloak to look like a servant, to do the menial work of a servant. In the first place he was dramatising to them that they need to be saved: "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." The burning love that took him to the cross is a love that washes, forgives, renews people's lives. It is God's grace poured onto us to set us free from the guilt, shame and power of sin. As you serve the homeless community in this difficult time, finding your way by trial and error, through discussion and debate, trust his grace and forgiveness for the mistakes you may make. Forgive one another. Forgive yourselves. It's not about being perfect; it's about being faithful.

John chapter 13 is clear: The love of Jesus does not only forgive; it also challenges and transforms us. It has the power to conquer our greed, pride and self-righteousness to draw us into that movement of love that took Jesus to the cross. The Lord Jesus washes our feet to recruit us to wash others' feet, to become servant leaders. He did not lead from above or from the front; he led from below. But there is an amazing power in such leadership, because it is human, kind, genuine and credible. It is also highly contagious and, as it spreads, often becomes a threat to authoritarian leaders, unjust policies and cruel practices. Do not be deterred or intimidated. Be the salt and the light of Tshwane, as you follow in the footsteps of our feet-washing Lord.

## Betrayal and denial (John 13:21-30; 36-38)

As Stephan wrote yesterday, wherever there is love, betrayal and denial is just around the corner. You cannot betray an enemy; only someone close to you, someone you trust and love. That makes it so disappointing and painful. The remarkable thing about Jesus is that he shares his last meal with Judas and Peter; he hands Judas the piece of bread as a sign of trust and solidarity. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said that Christ is always betrayed with a kiss, with an apparent sign of love. How do we keep our motives clean, our love for the Lord Jesus healthy and transparent? How do we preserve our integrity, like Jesus, in the midst of intrigue and challenges? How do we become wise and strategic, without being shrewd and devious?

May you find that wisdom and courage today, as you share your lives with the valuable vulnerable people around you – and learn with them what Jesus meant when he said: "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (v.34-35).

## Prayer

God of truth, gives us discernment today as we are surrounded by many voices; gives us boldness to resist those forces wanting to derail us; give us wisdom to act in ways that will honour you.

God of mercy, make us grateful for every new beginning; open for every gift of grace; mindful of your gentle Spirit among us, on this day.

God of love, wash us and forgive us; transform us by your grace to become servants of one another and of all people.

Faithful God, make us loyal and dependable, loving and compassionate as we share our lives with others.

Hold us in your mercy and truth.

Amen