**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

So here we are again at Maundy Thursday, the beginning of the Great Three Days, the so-called Triduum, when the church’s liturgy overflows with all manner of profound ritual; the day when many, perhaps most, congregations, have in the past enacted The Awkward Liturgical Experience.

But today, by dint of coronavirus invading the whole world, we are stuck at home.

The entire internet, of course, encourages us not to see it as stuck at home, but rather as safe at home. Quite right too. So that means that you are all safe, not only from the virus, but also from the usual exhortation to come forward and have your feet washed. And therefore safe from that precise Awkward Liturgical Experience.

Safe in that knowledge, though, think about it now. People stand, barefoot, in the aisle – or sit at the front and take socks and shoes off while everyone else is watching. If you haven’t got nice feet, pedicured, varnished toenails and so on, it’s more than a bit embarrassing. So much so that I know churches where they have replaced the whole thing with a ritual washing of hands instead. Which conjures up for me uncomfortable images of Pilate, washing his hands of the whole fiasco.

**We** come to church with layers and layers between the dirty ground and us: socks, shoes, carpet, flooring, floorboards, concrete. First-century Jews, though, wore open sandals, and the dust and grit and filth of bare earth floors and open streets used by animals and humans alike were the daily reality of feet. Which is why hosts would always offer water for washing the feet when a guest arrived, and those who were rich enough to have a slave or servant had them do the dirty work, so the guest didn’t have to.

Something was wrong, though, in this particular gospel scene. No one had offered them water and a servant for washing; and not one of the disciples offered either, despite them being, surely, next in line? I remembered the story of the mother of James and John, who wanted her sons to sit on Jesus’ right on his left in the kingdom; and Jesus said: Whoever wants to be your leader must be your servant. Whoever wants to be first must be a servant to the rest of you.

Yet not one of them offered.

So Jesus stood up, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and took a basin of water over to one of the disciples. He knelt and took the nearest man’s feet firmly in his hands, untied his sandals, and began to wash. Imagine the stunned silence as the rest of them watched him do this. *The Teacher? Washing feet?*

Of course, it’s Peter who can’t help himself from saying what all the others are thinking. Wrong. Just wrong. This is a yucky job fit only for the lowest. Our feet are caked with dirt and whatever-else-we-might-have-stepped-in; they stink; they’re cracked and calloused, and our toenails are broken and chipped, and our legs are hairy and insect-bitten.

And this is the big problem with most forms of Christian spirituality. We like to keep our spirituality spiritual. We like it cerebral, or emotional, but either way prayerful and pure. And socially-distanced. We like the nice words and the holy feelings. We like pristine Bibles, and pews with carpet on, and coffee after worship. But the other parts of us—the other parts of our lives - the hidden, yucky parts of our bodies, souls, and minds—need to stay hidden. For everyone’s sake. (There is a member of the eight o’clock congregation who counts the times I step out of formal mode. He’ll be thrilled I used the word ‘yucky’ twice in one sermon …)

There’s a fabulous painting by Ford Madox Brown of this scene, and I actually laughed out loud when I first saw it. You can see the confusion on the faces of the disciples: one in particular clasping his hands over his head in complete befuddlement. But the bit that made me laugh was Peter’s grumpy face, scowling at the inappropriateness of it all. ‘You will never wash my feet!’ In our terms, that might translate as: save my soul, Lord but leave my feet alone. Doctrinally, I’m right there, but this grubby human stuff is for me to deal with; not you.

Jesus takes absolutely no notice. Instead with love and care he washes all the ingrained grime away, telling us we will understand in due course. There is so much we don’t understand - why not this as well…

There is no one whose feet Christ does not love. Judas was there - and didn’t leave to betray Jesus until later in this chapter. That means that Jesus washed Judas’ feet too. Even though Jesus knew who was going to betray him. What was he thinking as he took Judas’ feet in his hands and cleaned them?

When all is said and done, this is not about washing feet. It is about the rich symbolism of servanthood. And it is about love.

There is so much love and care floating around the parish at the moment – unseen people helping unknown people to live as well as possible given the restrictions we are all operating under.

All of you – whether by staying in (you who are vulnerable in any way) – or by going out (as little as possible, but going out in order that the rest might stay in) – all of you are demonstrating love right now.

Love, though, is just as much about letting others serve us as it is about us serving them. Be a disciple.

**Amen**