

Maundy Thursday 2024 April Beckerleg

1 Corinthians 11.23-26

Exodus 12.1-4 [5-10] 11-14

John 13.1-17, 31b-35

Maundy Thursday is a bodily experience. We are of course bodily, fleshly beings. Perhaps we have had times when in search of the spiritual we have become neglectful of our physical bodies. We work on our prayer life, we come to church, we spend so long in our heads, thinking and wondering and going over the thoughts we forget that we are embodied creatures.

But this night, this seminal night in the life of Jesus, it's all about the body.

And not some kind of airbrushed, Instagram worthy body, but the real, warts and all, limitations and smelly bits and hairy bits, the wonderful bits and the bits we don't think work properly, or we feel let us down.

Somehow we have absorbed judgement about what is acceptable – how things should look –perhaps because we cover up most of our body most of the time, we do not pay it the attention it deserves.

But of all the faith traditions that there have ever been, Christianity is the one that honours the physical above all else. God was born from a woman. Anyone who has been at a birth knows it is an intensely physical process. It is messy, and loud, and dangerous and physically intense – but all of us, every single human that has ever been born has gone through it. And so did God. God put faith in a body of a woman, a woman who carried God in her own body, fed God from her own breasts, whose blood was shed to deliver the hope of the world.

But I wonder if there are times when we forget this in our desire to escape the real, physical, material world –have we been tempted to think that Jesus came to give us a disembodied transcendent experience of a spiritual heaven.

But the evidence of his life doesn't back that up. The evidence of this evening shows just how much Jesus wants us to live in our bodies. He washed their feet. Now our feet are not always the part of the body we feel most proud of. And with no manicures or chiropodist appointments Jesus would have been washing the corns, the broken toenails, the callouses and all.

And if that wasn't enough, Jesus made sure we understood just how important our body is by what he did next.

[He] took a loaf of bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' ²⁵In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

This is of course from the reading we have heard this evening, and we will hear in a little while, as we do every time we celebrate communion.

To centre our worship around this very physical process of taking Christ's body into our body is there to ensure that our spiritual life is not an escape from reality, but is rather a journey into the fullness of life. That we are not to be disconnected from our body, but to inhabit the fullness of our physical body – with tenderness and care, remembering that we are made in the image of God, and that Jesus asks us to take his body into our body so that the sip of wine, the fragment of bread, provides that visceral link between the fleshly, material realness of this present moment and the glimpse of the eternal, timeless phenomenon of all of reality.

This is not something that happens to us all at once. The depth and mystery of this night is one which reveals itself slowly, in a kind of fragmentary unfurling.

This is how it is to draw close to the divine, to catch a glimpse of God's reaching out to us, God's longing to be amongst us, to be a part of us.

Then we can experience each moment of breath, of what we hear and touch and see and feel bringing us closer to the fullness of all that we are called to be.