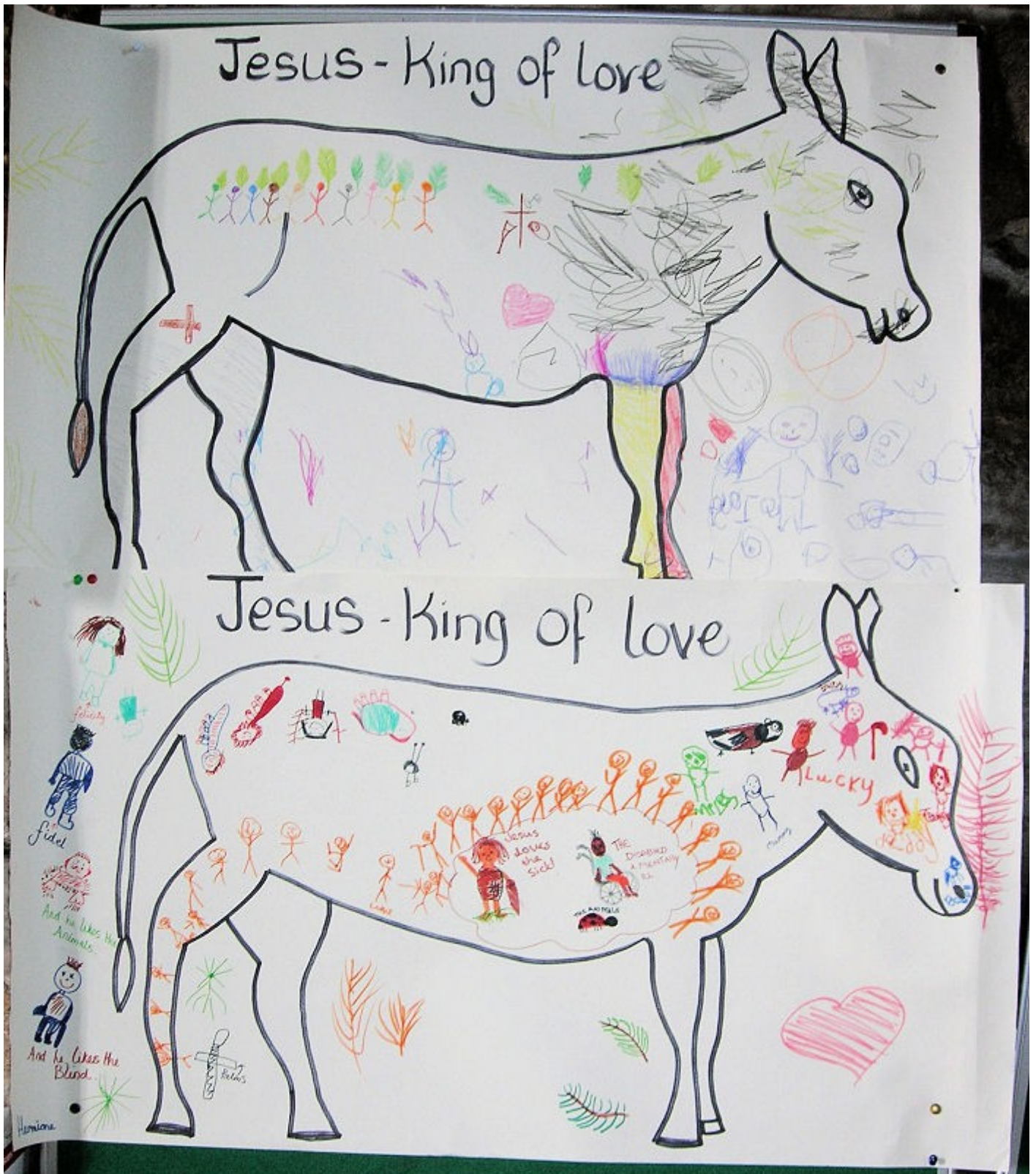


# The Leith-Lyvennet Parishes : Holy Week 2011

## The Road to Freedom



The donkey posters drawn by the children during the Palm Sunday Service.

# The Leith-Lyvennet Parishes : Holy Week 2011

## The Road to Freedom

### Stage 1: Thought: Choices

"You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last" (John 15:16)

- Tonight's reading all about choices. Jesus' choices set him on the road to freedom (even in the midst of pain, accusation, imprisonment and execution); Judas's choices lead him to destruction.
- Live in a society that believes that choice = freedom. Endless numbers of choices (political, social, sexual, consumer). Freedom = having choices. BUT it enslaves them.
- When choices made don't lead to perfection, change them and make different choices. Always being brought back to the same crossroads & never travelling to the end of the path.
- For Jesus, freedom = making one good choice and following it consistently in every choice he made thereafter (desert – cross).
- Astonishing truth at heart of gospel = Jesus chose us! (good choice?) Do we really believe that we are chosen?
- [Harry Potter illustration]. Sorting hat chose Harry and Harry chose Griffyndor.
- How many of us find our choices haunting us and enslaving us? "Am I really a Christian? Am I really a traitor, like Judas? After all, he followed Jesus too and I'm like him in many ways. Am I only a Christian because I chose to be, not because I am one deep down?"
- If so, we can be assured. Jesus chose you and his choice is sealed if you exercise your freewill to choose to accept him in return.
- If you have chosen Jesus, your choice shows who you truly are. It may close down other options, it may mean you have to leave the crossroads behind and travel the road you have chosen through good and bad – in the words of the old song "I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back". But that road is the road to freedom. And in choosing it, you have chosen your fate and you have chosen wisely.

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### Stage 2: There is therefore now no condemnation... (Tuesday of Holy Week – introduction to J.S. Bach's Jesu Priceless Treasure)

Time and again I come across people who say that they don't need to come to church because you can be just as good a person without coming. They're quite right of course. You can. The trouble is that they're thinking like a Pharisee and Jesus was pretty harsh on the Pharisees.

In fact the only acceptable qualification for coming to church is not that you should be a good person, but that you recognise your desperate need of mercy.

So long as we rely on our own goodness, we are in a trap, because we're living in fantasy world. And deep down we know it, because in fact it shows in our actions. The trouble is we don't acknowledge it – even to ourselves. We are so afraid of acknowledging it that we go to enormous lengths to hide our frailties and our failings. We spend our lives building up an image of ourselves that we are willing to present to the world and we can get very cross if people point out to us the reality of who we are, if it contradicts the image we labour so hard to present.

But all of that is exhausting work and it is ultimately bound to end in failure, because we simply can't live up to the image we want to present.

And that's why we tend to accompany our efforts to build ourselves up with the need to bring others down, by the pointing of the finger – pointing out the failings of others in the desperate hope that we might deflect people's attention from our own. Pointing to people's failings or idiosyncrasies or (best of all) demonising people, finding scapegoats we can blame to deflect any hint of blame that might find its way to us.

In so many ways, we are just like the Pharisees who turned on this poor woman at Jesus' feet, label-

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ling her a "sinner" and casting us out. When Patti read the script for that reflection she was outraged at the way she was labelled and that's just the point. If you weren't outraged at her treatment, then perhaps you weren't listening properly. But the terrible truth is that whenever we try to hide away from our own sinfulness and need of mercy, we end up pointing the finger at someone else and that is an outrageous injustice – them and to us.

But there is good news in the midst of all this. Because Jesus' death and resurrection mean that none of this is necessary any more. We can be forgiven the sin that causes us to behave in this way and we can be free from all condemnation. As St Paul reminds us, the only person who is really entitled to condemn us is Jesus and he's the very one who forgives us and speaks up for us on the day of Judgment.

So we can be free. Free to admit the truth about ourselves, free to look ourselves in the mirror, free to be seen for who we truly are and free from the exhausting and fruitless process of trying to be someone else and free to be generous to others, recognising that there is no-one more sinful than I, no-one less fit for Jesus' company than me and yet, here I am – at his feet, loved, accepted and justified. So God forbid that I should ever again stand in anyone else's way. Here is what the Archbishop of Canterbury says about this:

"...a properly functioning human group, doing what human groups under God are meant to do, would be one where we were engaged in learning quite intensively about the pressures that make us run away from the task God sets us. We should need to be developing some very well-tuned antennae for the varieties of competitiveness that take us over and for the ways in which we assume, secretly or openly, that success is always about someone else's loss. This prompts some uncomfortable thoughts about the sorts of disagreement we are so used to in the church. Inevitably, we think in terms of winning and losing, of this or that a controversy which must be resolved in accordance with God's will so that we prevail in God's name...

...[but,] the church is a community that exists because something has happened which makes the entire process of self-justification irrelevant. God's truth and mercy have appeared in concrete form in Jesus and, in his death and resurrection, have worked the transformation that only God can perform and told us what only God can tell us: that he has already dealt with the dreaded consequences of our failure, so we need not labour anxiously to save ourselves and put ourselves right with God. The church's aim is to be a community that demonstrates this decisive transformation as really experienceable. One of the chief anxieties from which the gospel delivers us is the need to protect my picture of myself as right and good. So one of the most obvious characteristics of the church ought to be a willingness to abandon anything like competitive virtue (or competitive suffering, or competitive victimage, competitive tolerance or competitive intolerance of whatever). The church points to the all-sufficiency of Christ when it is full of people whose concern is not to separate others from the hope of reconciliation and life by their fears and obsessions. A healthy church is one in which we seek to stay connected with God by seeking to connect others with God; one in which we 'win God' by converting one another, and we convert one another by our truthful awareness of our frailty. And a church that is living in such a way is the only church that will have anything different to say to the world; how deeply depressing if all the church offered were new and better ways to succeed at the expense of others, reinstating the scapegoat mechanisms that the cross of Christ should have exploded once and for all."

Once we have accepted Christ's forgiveness and have allowed that forgiveness to inform our understanding of ourselves, we are free to face the truth of who we are and we are free in turn to face the truth of who our brothers and sisters are. There is no more condemnation for us and so there is no longer any need to point the finger at anyone else. Our frailty, our weakness and our downright badness no longer need to be covered up, because they point only to the love and grace of Christ. So we are free to be true to ourselves and to point only to Christ who makes sense of our lives, who transforms our mistakes and sufferings and who is strong where we are weak.

That freedom is the theme of JS Bach's cantata, *Jesu, priceless treasure*. It is a freedom I pray we can find for ourselves and live out in his church here in this place.

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## The Road to Freedom

### Stage 3: The Gospel According to Matthew

This is the programme which accompanied our complete reading of Matthew's Gospel, telling the full story of the Road to Freedom. You are welcome to use it to accompany your own reading of Matthew's remarkable account.

## The Gospel According to Matthew A Complete Reading

Holy Week 2011  
Great Strickland Village Hall

*Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, υἱοῦ Δαυῖδ, υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ*

"The book of Genesis of Jesus, the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham"

#### Why Matthew's Gospel?

Each year of the church's calendar we focus on a particular gospel and Matthew is our gospel for this year. Since the gospel writer paid great attention to the order in which he portrayed the events of Jesus' life, there is no better way to understand his gospel than to read (or hear) it in full in the sequence the writer intended.

This year also marks the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the Authorised or King James Version of the bible, the first widely available version of the bible in our own language. To try to capture the impact this made, we are reading the complete gospel of Matthew from the New Revised Standard Version, the version which arguably best captures the spirit of the Authorised Version by translating, accurately and elegantly, the original biblical languages into the everyday English of today, whilst still retaining the cadences of the Authorised Version.

#### Guide to the Gospel

Matthew's gospel is a complete account of Jesus' life: the first words translate literally as "the book of Genesis" and the last words are "until the end of the age". The writer seems to saying that the whole of God's story and ours is being fulfilled in this story of Jesus. Hence he refers back constantly to the Old Testament to show that Jesus is the Messiah promised by God to fulfil his purposes for humanity. For this reason one of Matthew's catchphrases is "All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet..." Matthew also takes care to call Jesus by his Messianic names (e.g. Emmanuel, Son of David etc.) and to pick up on the prophet Isaiah's vision of the Messiah as God's suffering servant.

The era of Jesus was dominated by the issue of Israel's sovereignty and her relationship with the Gentile (non-Jewish) world; in particular the desire to recreate the idealised reign of King David, when Israel had been united and independent and when Israel's God had shown his approval by dwelling in the temple in Jerusalem.

However, by the time of Jesus, Israel was under Gentile (Roman) occupation and divided (the central region of Samaria having rebelled). Gentile occupation had been their lot for around 600 years since the Exile in (or Deportation to) Babylon, the most significant event in Biblical history. In 588 B.C. the Babylonians had laid siege to Jerusalem and taken the entire population captive to Babylon. In 538 B.C. the Babylonian empire had fallen and from 520 B.C. their new masters, the Persians, had sent them home to Jerusalem. However, they were still under Gentile occupation and thus began to grow a sense of being exiles in their own land. A succession of Gentile overlords, culminating in Roman

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rule, had exacerbated this and by Jesus' time, Jewish desire for independence had reached fever pitch, desperately longing for God to fulfil his promise of a Messiah to restore the golden age of King David.

The Messianic promises had indeed been about a new king, descended from David, who would restore Israel's sovereignty and bring God back to the temple to rule as Israel's king – an era they described as "the Kingdom of Heaven" or, in shorthand, "the age to come". Once that age arrived, it was believed that all Jews would be raised from the dead to participate in the kingdom of heaven, thus giving rise to the idea that one "goes to heaven" after death.

Herod was trying to usher in this new age by declaring himself king and rebuilding the Jerusalem temple. Jesus had other ideas about God's presence and kingship and this set him on a collision course with Herod and the temple authorities...

### Structure of the Narrative

Matthew's gospel begins with a Genealogy of Jesus. Because the Jewish faith is passed on through birth, it is essential to prove that one is a true descendent of Abraham. Genealogies were thus something of a Jewish obsession. In this case, however, the key point is to show Jesus' descent, not only from Abraham, but also from David. It is interesting to note that, in a departure from the norm, Matthew includes several notable women in Jesus' Genealogy.

The story in earnest begins in chapter 2 with the nativity, taking care to show that even Jesus' birth fulfilled the Messianic prophecies. The family then flee to Egypt before settling in Nazareth in Galilee, the Jewish Northern outpost, separated from the main territory of Judea by the disputed territory of Samaria (see map).

Jesus' ministry then begins from Judea with two episodes which reverse the Old Testament story of Israel's origins: He begins with his baptism in the river Jordan (through which the Jewish people first arrived in the Promised Land on fleeing from slavery in Egypt) and then completes a 40 day fast in the desert, echoing the 40 years the Jewish people spent in the desert before reaching the Jordan. Thus Jesus begins by reversing Israel's story, going back into her captivity to set her free in a new way.

The gospel thereafter has two main sections, each introduced by another of Matthew's catchphrases "from that time on...":

1. Jesus' ministry in Galilee, announcing the arrival of the long-awaited kingdom of Heaven and calling disciples to help build it;
2. His pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover (via the traditional route down the Jordan to Jericho to avoid Samaria).

The turning point of the narrative is Chapter 16 where Jesus has to leave Galilee after some trouble with the Pharisees and lie low in the Gentile city of Caesarea Philippi. Here Peter confesses that he believes Jesus to be the Messiah and "from that time on..." Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem and his death, which he foresees as the ultimate victory over Israel's (and humanity's) true enemy.

Jesus' teachings are broken down into 5 main sections which give us a helpful overview of the gospel's structure:

- Chapters 5-7: the manifesto of the kingdom of Heaven
- Chapter 10: the mission
- Chapter 13: the parables
- Chapter 18: the life of his new Israel (the church)
- Chapter 24-25: the future (the age to come)

Each block is followed by the phrase "When Jesus had finished saying these things...". In between these blocks of teaching we see Jesus showing the power of his kingdom through miracles (chapters 8-9), encountering opposition from the Jewish authorities (chapters 11-12), feeding his people and

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reaching out to the Gentiles (chapters 14-16) and journeying to Jerusalem for the final conflict, death and resurrection (chapters 19 onwards). The gospel ends with Jesus, triumphant over sin and death, commissioning his followers to tell the world about him, to build his kingdom and call others to join the work, all underpinned by his assurance that he will be with us until the end of the age, when the building of the kingdom of Heaven is finally completed and the "age to come" can finally begin.

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### Stage 4: "To serve you is perfect Freedom" (John 13.1-17,31b-35)

#### Maundy Thursday

I have a confession to make – I've never delivered a Maundy Thursday sermon before. But don't worry, you're in safe hands, because I've listened to many Maundy Thursday sermons and I know how the script goes:

"Jesus washed his disciples' feet and told us to do the same. Footwashing is a symbol of service, so he was commanding us to serve one another."

How they string that out into half an hour I'm not sure, but I'll give it a go...

Now, it's not that I disagree. In fact I do heartily agree. Footwashing is a symbol of service and we're clearly supposed to serve one another. But three things bother me. Firstly, as I look around our local communities, the people I see coming to our churches are the same people who sit on the Parish Council, run the luncheon clubs for the elderly, drive the fell-runner bus, run the local coffee mornings, serve as school governors and lunchtime assistants, run holiday clubs, serve in the local charity shops, visit the sick and housebound, organize the village fete. I could go on...

What's the point of me telling you lot you need to serve your local community? So instead of giving you a lecture on servanthood, I want to begin by saying how much I admire you for all that you're already doing and to say what a splendid bunch of people I think you are. And I'm certainly not going to be using this sermon to lay before you an whole new list of things we should be doing on top of the things we're already doing.

But the second thing that bothers me is that it's not so difficult washing people's feet. In my experience, the real difficulty is in finding people willing to have their feet washed! In every parish I've every been in, finding victims for the Maundy Thursday footwashing is like trying to find hens' teeth. For weeks beforehand, people start crossing the road to avoid me in case I ask them. The only consolation is that Jesus had exactly the same problem. Peter's response, "You'll never wash my feet" is one I've had over and over. So I wonder whether that's telling us something that we often overlook. And the third thing that's bothering me is the words of that old collect, which we used to say every Sunday and seems to have disappeared into the liturgical dustbin. I had to dust it down again specially for this evening:

O God, the author of peace and lover of concord,  
to know you is eternal life,  
to serve you is perfect freedom...

It's a wonderful collect and it says so much. I don't know why we don't have it every week any more. But what does that mean: "to serve you is perfect freedom"?

This Holy Week, we're on the Road to Freedom. We began on Monday by considering how our choices can enslave us or set us free. And on Tuesday we considered how important it was to receive forgiveness and put an end to condemnation in order to be free. But how does serving God set us free?

Well, the first thing to say is that Jesus clearly intended us to grasp this aspect of his footwashing manoeuvre. Our gospel reading began with the words "Now before the festival of the Passover..." Passover, the Jewish festival of freedom, was the context for Jesus' actions and the gospel writer, John, clearly wants us to associate Jesus' actions and ultimate fate with a new Passover, the ultimate freedom.

The other context for Jesus' actions is his relationship with his Father and the Holy Spirit. Tonight's gospel passage is part of a larger speech Jesus made to his disciples that is full of references to the relationships within the God the Holy Trinity. He is washing his disciples feet, we are told, because

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"his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father" and a few verses after our gospel reading ends, he is promising the Holy Spirit to his followers.

So some very familiar strands are coming together here. You've heard me bang on constantly about how the God we worship has revealed himself to be a God of relationship – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons who love one another with so great an intensity that they are one God. And so utterly selfless is their love for one another that the exchange of their love is eternally life-giving. That's why we can say, as Christians, that God is love.

You have also heard me bang on about the fact that we are made in the image of this Trinitarian God of love – designed to be in loving relationship with him and that the greatest tragedy of our existence is that we've marred that relationship through our sin and so have come adrift – no longer moored to the God of love and are, in every sense lost.

And you've also heard me bang on about the fact that eternal life is not life after death, but life living in restored loving relationship with the Trinitarian God of love, in whose image we are made and whose love we were hand-crafted to have at the heart of our existence. That's why Jesus commands us to love one-another, because eternal life is all about love rediscovered.

And, you've heard me bang on about the fact that the all-powerful love that is the Trinitarian God we serve, is also fundamentally creative and that this God is no less creative today than he was on that first day when life first sprang out of nothingness.

And finally, you've heard me bang on about the fact that this loving, forgiving, eternally creative Trinitarian God, shares his ministry with us. And so we are called, as his chosen people, to be a royal priesthood. My purpose as an ordained priest is primarily to enable you to exercise your priesthood, individually and collectively and to draw us all together into one body – a priesthood of all believers.

Now this evening, all of these strands are being tied together. And that's going to make all the difference. You see, we're very good at serving, as I've already noted. We're not bad at coming to church (let's face it, we clergy are never completely happy about church attendance, so I'm not going to give you more than a B-) but even I'd admit you're not bad. And we're really pretty good here about building fellowship and being forward looking and wanting to reach out to others.

But what we don't always do is put it all together. And I think that makes all the difference. To put it very simply, we're happy doing the footwashing, but we're not very happy about having our feet washed by Jesus. When it comes to that, we're all in Peter's camp.

But as Jesus said "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." No share. Interesting words. Sometimes translated as "no part with me". In other words, if Jesus isn't washing your feet, what you're doing (however busy and however noble) isn't his work.

Later on in this same speech Jesus says "without me, you can do nothing" – unless you're abiding in me, you cannot be fruitful.

So if our lives are to be joined up and fruitful, we need to begin by letting Jesus wash our feet. What does that mean? Well, to get a sense of that, we need to examine why we don't like having our own feet washed by another. You can do this exercise yourself, but for me, it's partly about the feet. Feet are not our best feature are they? We're all slightly embarrassed about our feet. They're inglorious things and for my part I'd rather hide them. So for me, letting Jesus wash my feet is partly about being willing to present before him the things that I'd rather hide, the things in my life that are inglorious.

Feet are also the parts of us that hit the road, that connect with the world and they can't do that without being dirty. And part of our Christian calling (as we've been noting at our ATOM services) is to be in the world, but not of the world. We are supposed to connect with the dirty bits of the world, the latter-day sinners and tax-collectors, our own private temptations and weaknesses. We do so in order to transform them, but sometimes we end up getting soiled ourselves in the process. And so we need to keep coming back to Jesus for cleansing, even if we are ultimately forgiven (clean), we still need daily footwashing for the parts that get mucky through our daily encounter with a soiled world.

And the other thing I find uncomfortable about footwashing is the intimacy. We British are not very good at intimacy. We all know it goes on behind closed doors, but we try to keep it to a minimum in public. And there is something uncomfortably intimate about footwashing. It's completely platonic of course, but still uncomfortably intimate.

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And I think we all have the same problem with Jesus. It's a bit of a battle to let him into our hearts with any kind of intimacy. We naturally want to keep our hearts reserved and withdrawn. We want to preserve our dignity and we don't really want to face the consequences of what might happen if we let Jesus in there. In many ways, we react to Jesus' yearning for intimacy with us in exactly the same way as we react to me chasing around with a towel trying to find footwashing volunteers. And yet, once we overcome that fear and let him in, it is the most wonderfully life-giving experience you can have. I reckon I know about this because I well remember the feeling of trying to keep Jesus out of my heart and I also remember the flood of relief and joy when I finally let him in and it changed my life immeasurably for the better and forever.

So, put all that together and what does it mean? Well, if we can let Jesus intimately into our hearts, if we can let him wash our feet daily, cleansing us from whatever muck we've picked up each day, presenting him with the things in our lives we'd rather hide or are inglorious, and receiving deep in our hearts his love and forgiveness, everything else begins to fall into place.

With our relationship with God restored and sustained every day, we can be invigorated every day with eternal life. Being invigorated with eternal life, brings to life God's gifts in each of us and spurs on our creativity. Our creativity then connects with Jesus' will to help us discern God's unique calling for each of us. It gives us a purpose in life and the means with which to live our lives fruitfully. And it liberates us to go and do it, not being anxious of the consequences or fearful of failure, but confident that we are serving someone we love deeply and who loves us more deeply than we can ever grasp. And that is perfect freedom. Serving other people is mere drudgery. Serving ourselves is simply exhausting and disheartening. But serving the God who is love, who is eternal life, is exhilarating, life-giving and liberating.

O God, the author of peace and lover of concord, to know you is eternal life,  
to serve you is perfect freedom: defend us your servants from all assaults of our enemies, that we may trust in your defence and not fear the power of any adversaries;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Preached: Great Strickland (joint) 21.04.2011

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"The truth will set you free"

### An Hour at the Foot of the Cross

All Saints, Bolton

Good Friday, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2011

Anthem: God so loved the world (J. Stainer)

Collect & Lord's prayer

There is a green hill far away,  
without a city wall,  
where the dear Lord was crucified  
who died to save us all.

We may not know, we cannot tell,  
what pains he had to bear,  
but we believe it was for us  
he hung and suffered there.

He died that we might be forgiven,  
he died to make us good,  
that we might go at last to heaven,  
saved by his precious blood.

There was no other good enough  
to pay the price of sin;  
he only could unlock the gate  
of heaven and let us in.

O dearly, dearly has he loved!  
And we must love him too,  
and trust in his redeeming blood,  
and try his works to do.



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<p style="text-align: right;"><i>Cecil Frances Alexander</i></p> <p>Reading: John 18:33-38</p> <p>Meditation: "‘Truth’ I said, ‘what is truth?’" <i>by Pontius Pilate</i></p> <p><i>Silence</i></p> <p>My people, what wrong have I done to you? What good have I not done for you? Listen to me.</p> <p><b>Holy God, holy and strong, holy and immortal, have mercy upon us.</b></p> <p>Anthem: O Lord, who dares to smite thee (J.S. Bach)</p> <p>O sacred head, sore wounded, defiled and put to scorn; O kingly head surrounded with mocking crown of thorn: What sorrow mars thy grandeur? Can death thy bloom deflower? O countenance whose splendour the hosts of heaven adore!</p>	<p>I pray thee, Jesus, own me, me, Shepherd good, for thine; who to thy fold hast won me, and fed with truth divine. Me guilty, me refuse not, incline thy face to me, this comfort that I lose not, on earth to comfort thee.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Robert Bridges, 1899</i></p> <p>Reading: Mark 15:6-15</p> <p>Meditation: "I still can't believe my luck" <i>by Barabbas</i></p> <p><i>Silence</i></p> <p>My people, what wrong have I done to you? What good have I not done for you? Listen to me.</p> <p><b>Holy God, holy and strong, holy and immortal, have mercy upon us.</b></p>
<p>My song is love unknown, my saviour's love to me, love to the loveless shown that they might lovely be. O who am I that for my sake my Lord should take frail flesh and die?</p> <p>He came from his blest throne salvation to bestow, but men made strange, and none the longed-for Christ would know. But O my Friend, my Friend indeed, who at my need his life did spend!</p> <p>Sometimes they strew his way, and his sweet praises sing, resounding all the day hosannas to their King. Then "Crucify!" is all their breath, and for his death they thirst and cry.</p> <p>They rise, and needs will have my dear Lord made away;</p>	<p>a murderer they save, the Prince of Life they slay. Yet steadfast he to suffering goes, that he his foes from thence might free.</p> <p>Here might I stay and sing, no story so divine: never was love, dear King, never was grief like thine! This is my Friend, in whose sweet praise I all my days could gladly spend.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Samuel Crossman</i></p> <p>Reading: John 19:1-16</p> <p>Mediation: "What got into us that day?" <i>by one of the mob</i></p> <p><i>Silence</i></p> <p>Anthem: O Salutaris hostia (G. Rossini) "Lord, who for us was sacrificed, you opened heaven's portals wide; guard us now from our foes O Christ, your strength and saving help provide. Give strength, Lord, and grant us your saving help."</p>

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My God, I love Thee; not because  
I hope for Heav'n thereby,  
Nor yet because who love Thee not  
Are lost eternally.

Thou, O my Jesus, thou didst me  
Upon the cross embrace;  
For me didst bear the nails and spear,  
And manifold disgrace.

And griefs and torments numberless,  
And sweat of agony;  
E'en death itself; and all for me  
Who was thine enemy.

Then why, O blessèd Jesu Christ  
Should I not love Thee well?  
Not for the hope of winning Heaven,  
Nor of escaping hell;

Not with the hope of gaining aught,  
Not seeking a reward,  
But as thyself hast lovèd me,  
O ever-loving Lord!

So would I love thee, dearest Lord,  
And in thy praise will sing,  
Solely because thou art my God,  
And my most loving King.

*17<sup>th</sup> C. tr. E Caswall*

Reading: Luke 23:32-43

Meditation: "Father, Forgive them"  
*by Timothy Radcliffe O.P.*

*Silence*

My people, what wrong have I done to you?  
What good have I not done for you?  
Listen to me.

**Holy God,  
holy and strong,  
holy and immortal,  
have mercy upon us.**

**Jesus, remember me,  
when you come into your kingdom**

Reading: John 19:25-27

Meditation: "He was thinking of me, even then!"  
*by Mary, mother of Jesus*

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?  
Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow  
which was brought upon me,  
which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce  
anger.

**Holy God,  
holy and strong,  
holy and immortal,  
have mercy upon us.**

Anthem: Ave, verum corpus (W.A. Mozart)

*"Hail Jesus, Mary's son, in bread and wine revealed;  
born and suffered, for us offered; for humanity cruci-  
fied. From your body pierced flowed water and blood;  
be our example and in the hour of our death and trial,  
our food."*

When I survey the wondrous Cross  
on which the Prince of Glory died;  
my richest gain I count but loss,  
and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
save in the Cross of Christ my God;  
all the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to his blood.

See, from his head, his hands, his feet,  
sorrow and love flow mingling down.  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
that were an offering far too small;  
love so amazing, so divine,  
demands my soul, my life, my all.

*Isaac Watts*

Reading: Luke 23:44-48

*Silence until 3pm. We depart in silence.*

# The Leith-Lyvennet Parishes : Holy Week 2011

## The Road to Freedom

### Stage 6: If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

It all comes down to this. The whole story of humanity reaches its climax on this night, when Jesus rose back from the dead. And it's not just a great story, with a surprise happy ending. It's a real-life event which happened to a real-life person that has changed the course of our destiny forever. We all know that death is what lies at the end of our lives. It's not something we think of or speak of very often, because it's frankly too depressing. But ignoring it isn't going to make it go away. Something else is though. Or rather, someone else – Jesus. You see, it's all about Jesus. Yes, you can live by Christian principles and ideas, but without Jesus himself you're decapitating the Christian faith and passing up the opportunity to live real life and to be free. Because it's Jesus who gives us life and sets us free.

You see, Jesus was a remarkable person. In most ways exactly like us, but also significantly different. He was a complete human being, just like you or I, but he came back to life after death because he was also our God.

God, our creator, had become one of us. And what he told us, as one of us, was that our trouble is that we've all wandered away from our creator and the natural consequence of that is death. And so what he's telling us is that death is our choice– the result of how we choose to live. But it's not his choice and if we listen to him, it doesn't need to be that way.

And I think I know what he means because I'm one of those blokes who, whenever I get a new gadget, never bothers to read the manufacturer's instructions. I just play around until I get the thing working and it usually works okay, but I nearly always miss most of the things my gadget can do because I haven't read the manufacturer's instructions. And sometimes I even wreck the machine by not using it as it was intended.

And that's rather like what we're all doing with life. God, our manufacturer, is telling us how to live, but we ignore him. And we're missing out on the most important things and in the end we wreck the life-force within us.

It's very simple really. The life-force comes from God, so unless we're plugged in to God, when our bodies die, we're not connected to his life-force any more, so that's the end.

Except that it's not, because he's done something about it. That wandering away from God is what we Christians call sin. Sin isn't really the bad things you do - they're just symptoms of a greater problem. Sin is really about breaking our relationship with God, wandering away from him. And that destroys us, because we are totally dependent on God. And we can't do anything about it because we're all in the same boat. Help!!

Except that there's someone else in the boat – Jesus. One of us, but also God's son. So he lives our life, but doesn't repeat our mistakes. He's just as tempted as we are to wander off on his own way, but he stays constantly plugged into God. And having lived the opposite way from us (being faithful to God where we were unfaithful), he also reverses our destiny. And so when we killed Jesus, death began to work backwards. Because Jesus, having never broken his relationship with his father, and being full of the life-force of God, burst back to life and he's alive now...and forever.

And what he offers us this night is freedom – freedom from our sins and the freedom to live: being recreated to live in a way that will never be destroyed – because we can come back to God and have his life-force at the centre of our being. But it's something we have to choose.

Many people think that if God's a nice God, he'll give everyone eternal life. But if eternal life is about living his way and not our way, he wouldn't be very nice if he forced it on us would he? In actuality, he's so nice that he gives us a choice. But he desperately wants us to choose to live – and that means choosing him.

Now I realise that might sound rather counter-intuitive. Surely freedom is really about choosing whatever we want, rather than doing God's will? But, the reality is that if we dethrone God, we crown something else as god in his place – whether it's some other spirit, or materialism, or other people, or some other philosophy, we ultimately rule our lives by something or someone. And I don't think anything else is a good thing to have ruling over your life. Because everything else in the world ultimately tries to control you. And so, even though you think you're choosing for yourself, in reality you're not. Take money for example. The more you get, the more you want. Is that freedom? Or people. Even the best people in the world are a bit manipulative are we? It's not that we're bad. It's

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## **The Road to Freedom**

just that we're needy. That's why even the best relationships let you down and there are many relationships that fall far short of the best.

But Jesus is the one person worth crowning as our king and our God. Why? Because he is entirely selfless and lives only for us. He knows us perfectly and he loves us perfectly and longs to give us what we really need in life. Instead of forcing us to serve him, he longs to serve us. That's his way of being king. And so crowning Jesus as king of your life is the only thing that will truly set you free.

Jesus' resurrection means that life should never be the same again. It doesn't mean we won't face suffering any more, but it does mean that life is possible for us and that death doesn't need to have the last word. It is because Jesus is alive that we can be free from all our past mistakes and our wrong turnings all our worries about how best to live for the future, because he has already dealt with all our mistakes and every day he'll give us what we need to live the day ahead.

Now, we've all just renewed our baptism vows. Let them really mean something this night. Let Jesus' resurrection change your life. Ask him to forgive your sins – those years spent ignoring him - put them behind you, and turn to him. Immerse yourself in him – in his word, in prayer and worship and in the community he came to build. And you will receive his forgiveness and his eternal love flooding into your life and you will be free indeed.

Amen.

*Preached at St Lawrence, Crosby Ravensworth at the Easter Eve Service.*

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