



## Barefoot Disciples

A sermon by Revd Katherine Hedderly

**Readings: Exodus 12.1-4, 11-14; 1 Corinthians 11.23-26; John 13.1-17, 31b-35**

Our theme here at St Martin's for Lent has been The Path of Humility, and Stephen Cherry's book, *Barefoot Disciple – Walking the way of Passionate Humility*, has been our guide and encouragement. Week by week we have gathered on our Lent course to explore more deeply what that call to humble discipleship means for us.

We have been encouraged to share experiences of pilgrimage that brought change in our lives, of when we have been a stranger in another culture and what it meant to allow ourselves to step out of our comfort zone and allow ourselves to be overwhelmed and humbled by the experience. We have looked at what it might mean for us to live generously for others, expressed in hospitality and mirroring God's generosity to us, the challenge to recognise the gifts of others and our own gifts, that are in solidarity with others, and not about elevating ourselves, about experiences that humble us and break us open to reveal God's grace, rather than break us down.

We have been invited to look at the deeper meaning behind our grumbling, seeking ways to act justly and lovingly and humbly to bring change. We have recounted times when we have known what it has been like to be truly served, to be childlike, and how the vulnerability of daring to go barefoot, has opened our heart to the vulnerability of the world around us and to God's presence with us.

We have been encouraged to live with a humble and thankful attitude, knowing that our lives depend on the acts, care, love, hard work, skills and generosity of others. And woven through it all an awareness that to be humble also means to be passionate, as Jesus was passionate about the things of God that really matter, passionate about living with the passionate love of God that will not let us go. Living humbly and passionately transforms us into barefoot disciples. You will have your own understanding of this in your life, think of the things that have taught you what it means to be truly humble.

At the end of his book Stephen Cherry invites us to think about touch as being a particularly humbling act that we share with one another. We think of the many times in the gospels when Jesus touches those who come to him, children who are brought to him, those who come in need of healing, the disciples Jesus touches when they are fearful, and even in the high drama of his arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, the servant of the high priest whom he touches and heals.

Jesus also received the touch of others - the woman who reaches out from the crowd to touch him, Mary who anoints his feet generously, extravagantly and lovingly in John's Gospel. Jesus was in touch with others, he was in touch with people's real lives, he didn't put up barriers but allowed them to touch him and was deeply moved by their circumstances - he himself lived a barefoot life, down in the dirt and dust of life – a place Stephen Cherry describes "of dust and of divine encounter".

"That is why" he says, "God in Christ had his feet anointed. This is why God in Christ shows us how to wash one another's feet. This is why we have our heads marked with ash at the beginning of Lent and why, on Good Friday, Jesus is crucified barefoot and naked. ...Dust and divinity are never to be

separated in the Christian imagination, for they are reconciled in the flesh of Jesus Christ, the most human, and humble, of human beings. We must take off our shoes to follow him; for we are treading the holy ground of the real earth.”<sup>1</sup>

That place of dust and divine encounter, of touch and real earth is the holy ground where we are invited to meet with Christ tonight, where we are invited to take off our shoes, as feet are humbly washed, as bread is broken and placed into our open hands, and wine is shared. And we come as barefoot disciples, with dusty feet, very much in need of that humble touch on our lives. There is no barrier to our touching him, or being touched by him, except the barrier of our pride, or our self-sufficiency. Aware of that touch, it gives us hope that God in Christ is in touch with creation, our barefoot and vulnerable world, with those who feel themselves to be a long way from others through loneliness, through ill health or grief, and is reaching out and offering that loving touch to those who turn their backs and contribute to the darkness and distress of our world.

As Jesus faced the greatest humiliation, and indignity, the fear and betrayal and darkness of the crucifixion to come, and the abandonment by those closest to him, we find him in the dust with his disciples, lovingly, humbly showing them how to live. With life about to rapidly become fractured and fragmented by his impending death, Jesus gathers his disciples and entrusts his life into their hands, by asking them to entrust their lives into his hands.

He shows them how to live together - loving one another as he loves them. And how to live with him – humbly being served by him, and humbly receiving from him. Touching their lives in an act of loving service, touching their lives in this darkest hour, with the symbols and actions of the Eucharist, that are signs of hope and of life. He is literally giving himself into their hands, God’s love, present in acts of service, in bread and wine and community together. God’s touch to lead them through the darkness to come.

This is a night of urgency, but in the midst of this it is also a night of loving action, as Jesus demonstrates his new way of doing things. Humble, passionate love is breaking in. It is an invitation to us to be those who love as he loves. Simply, generously, humbly and in a way that will change the world.

Our barefoot journey has been about becoming a stranger, about being prepared to go out of our comfort zone losing our bearings, about having to learn something new in order to understand, about generous and open living as guest and host, about learning to find and be present with God in the detail and dust of our lives. In all of this we are invited to choose life as we recognise and respond to God’s holy love, that is deeply humble.

Jesus also is about to become a stranger, to become overwhelmed, to lose his bearings in the passion of the cross and the horror of Good Friday. And we are invited to go that strange and uncomfortable journey with him. Way out of our comfort zone, overwhelmed with the gracelessness and harshness of his brutal death.

But we are invited to go barefoot.

Barefoot as his disciples gathered in the Upper Room, barefoot as we watch in the darkness as they did, barefoot as we run away or watch from a distance and we see him crucified.

And barefoot as we wait for the dawn of Easter Day, of the new life of the resurrection, and the glorious feeling of walking barefoot on soft wet grass in the morning.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Cherry, *Barefoot Disciple: Walking the Way of Passionate Humility*, Continuum, 2011, p.172

Will we follow on the path of humility that takes our barefoot Lord to the cross. And be humbled by the passionate love he shows us there. A humble and holy love for all the world?

Amen.