

# Maundy Thursday Sermon

Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> April 2020

*1 Corinthians 11. 23-26; John 13. 1-17, 31b-35*

The sadness and drama of Good Friday, and the celebration and surprises of Easter Day, are Christian events of cosmic proportions. They are about God's purposes in all creation, for the whole universe, for all nations. They are a drama of salvation and new life, with the person of Jesus Christ right at the epicentre. And indeed it was an earthquake in human history, which ripples through all time for ever.

Today on Maundy Thursday, we focus on the role of the Church in this drama; the call to Christians to be pioneers and instruments of God's salvation and new life in Jesus Christ. So we hear again the call to learn in God's grace to love like God does, to love like Jesus does. We renew our own commitment, and the commitment of our church, to mission and ministry, as God calls each of us to different roles, and equips us through his Holy Spirit to carry them out. And we celebrate the gift of Holy Communion; which is a celebration of all these things, including God's promise to be with us. Our Maundy celebration today is very much a celebration of what the Church of Jesus Christ is called to be.

However, Maundy Thursday this year has a different feel to it. Our church is necessarily closed because of the Coronavirus pandemic, because we can serve our community better, serve God better, by staying at home and helping to reduce the infection rate so that the health service, and also essential community services, are not overwhelmed. Moreover the Archbishops of the Church of England have decided that not even clergy can pray in churches, or stream worship from churches, so that clergy and people share the same exile from their parish churches, so that clergy do not have any sort of privileged access.

In some ways this feels like the Church abandoning what it exists for, its *raison d'être*; things like inspiring worship, the gathering the Body of Christ, with parish churches being living signs of prayer and God's love for all. And there is a very real sense of loss that our church is not for the time being a place where these things can continue. It seems a particular loss for a church like St Mary-le-Tower, which doesn't minister to a defined area, but rather draws people together from a wide area for a particular style of worship, which immerses young people and adults together in thrilling and life changing spiritual music.

We have no choice however, but to accept our exile and learn from it. And we are learning. And we will learn a great deal more over the coming months. For we are learning to be a church which, for a while has no physical building, no special gathering place for all that it does. We are learning to be a church in which our relationships with one another are the most important thing about our life together, at a time when we have the time and must make the time, to attend to those relationships, because this will no longer happen as a by-product of doing other things.

## **ST MARY-LE-TOWER CHURCH IPSWICH**

Our choir is working hard at still being a choir, with virtual singing online, and Zoom meetings for continuing the learning and the lessons and the fun, and indeed the hope that it will not be too long when we can meet physically together again. We are joining together in worship via streamed live services from clergy houses all over the land. We are working to be in touch with everyone pastorally, whether or not they have electronic gadgets. This is demanding stuff. It takes time and persistence and dedication, and there is much to learn in new skills.

The archbishops are keen to point out that in some ways, this is the Church rediscovering its roots; that the church buildings we love are great things to have for mission and ministry and celebration, but that the Church is not fundamentally dependent on them. We do need them very much in the long term, for all sorts of reasons, they have their important purposes. But rather like an extended Lenten period, a time when we give up something we greatly enjoy in order to rediscover other more important things, the Church in this particular time has the chance to rediscover what are the fundamentals of what it means to be Church.

The ways we care for one another. The ways we depend upon God. The ways we serve the people around us in Christ's name. The ways we serve one another. And there are new ways of being Church that are coming from being on-line, of learning that it is not a building that joins us together, but the Holy Spirit who, rather surprisingly, is very comfortable with using social media and meeting on line. We will rediscover in practice, new things about the way the Holy Spirit works too. The Holy Spirit is not bounded by our church walls and never has been.

I have no doubt that the call of Jesus this year, in Holy Week this year, is to regain that vision, which just happens to be a 2020 vision. What a coincidence that is! There will be more new things that we will need to work it, so that when we are able to meet again in St Mary-le-Tower, we can pick up without losing a beat, we can find our life together strengthened, and our sense of God's presence among us renewed.

So don't lose heart. There is much work to do both within and beyond the church community, in prayer and service, and we will find Jesus going before us. Amen.

CJ. 09.04.20