

Sermon on Maundy Thursday for „the Order of Spiritual Communion”

St. George’s Church, 9 April 2020

Readings: 1 Cor 11:23-26, John 13:1-17.31b-35

Dear friends,

In his Palm Sunday sermon Rev Christopher remarked that in times of the corona pandemic we are discovering anew the brokenness and fallenness of nature surrounding us and the frailty of our own human nature. Tonight, as we are unable to celebrate together in one room and to follow Jesus with the washing of the feet and the sharing of bread and wine, we are reminded by the enforced physical separation that our human nature has first of all a physical dimension that we not only *have* bodies, but that we *are* bodies. Bodies in all their liveliness, beauty, and positive energy, but also in their frailty and vulnerability.

Maybe some of you have had the experience of having their own feet washed by our chaplain Rev Christopher in front of the altar of St. George’s Church. I was granted that occasion once, and the action upon my body left a deep impression on my mind and soul. I wish we all could share that physical experience tonight. We cannot. But if you are reading today’s Gospel of the washing of the feet again for yourself you will *understand* what you would *feel* if your feet were washed in church: Being helped physically does us and each human being a world of good in body, soul, and mind. Jesus says: “I have set

you an example.” And: “If you know these things, you are blessed if you **do** them”. This is why all those who help the sick of the Covid-19 pandemic are blessed, and this is why everyone who helps his or her neighbour physically is blessed by Jesus Christ himself.

The story of Jesus’ washing of the feet of the disciples reminds us that we humans are bodies. We are not simply souls trapped in a mortal prison. We believe bodies and souls are inseparably entwined. And we believe that God came not as a book of religious laws or as a creed or an idea, but as a person in a body, Jesus. In assuming a body, God redeems our bodies. Therefore, we believe in the resurrection not merely of the soul, but also of the body.

Our bodies in action can be a vessel for our and the word’s salvation. This is also true if we have a look at the Eucharistic bread and wine, which Jesus gave tonight, the Thursday before Passover, to his disciples for the first time, ordering them and us to celebrate it again and again: “**Do** this in remembrance of me”.

In today’s readings two points are characterized as new. The first is the “*new covenant*”. Jesus himself says: “This cup is the *new covenant* in my blood” (1 Cor 11:25). In times of physical, of bodily distancing we are called to come together physically and to

share in ONE bread and in ONE cup, which cannot be done simultaneously other than in one place.

For good reasons, which we all understand well, we are not allowed to celebrate the new covenant tonight as our Lord did tell us to do. But that does not mean that we should refrain this Maundy Thursday from renewing the covenant which Jesus proposes us anew tonight. On the contrary. Let us therefore renew tonight *our* part of the new covenant: That is **our pledge to share our bodies with the body of Christ**. And when I ask you and myself **to share our bodies with the body of Christ**, this for me has a twofold meaning.

The first meaning is this: that we promise **to come to Christ and to unite with him in his body** which we receive when we go to communion and eat bread which his body and drink wine which is his blood. This is a covenant renewed Sunday by Sunday as we participate in Holy Communion.

The second meaning of our pledge tonight **to share our bodies with the body of Christ** is this: that we promise **to share our physical faculties and resources with the Church** which is the body of Christ. This is why in today's Gospel we hear of another new point of reference for our lives next to the new covenant. This second new point is the *new commandment* given to us as the fulfillment of the *new covenant*. The new commandment is this: "Love one another." Share your body with the bodies of your

fellow Christians and with your fellow human beings by caring for their wellbeing in physical care, in health care, in social care, in financial care, and in mental care. This is a covenant renewed daily as we try to meet the needs of the bodies, souls, and minds of our neighbours, and as we confess our shortcomings in this endeavor.

A new covenant and a new commandment. – "Nothing new under the sun", you may respond to today's readings. And certainly there is nothing new as long as we lean back and comment on biblical texts. But there will be new insights, and new life-changing developments, if we start to *live* accordingly on a day-to-day basis; if we renew our covenant with Christ in the Eucharist weekly and if we realize the Lord's commandment "Love one another" daily.

May the time come soon when we meet again around the altar at St. George's Church or any other Christian altar. And may the time come today, and tomorrow, and all the days of our lives when we love one another. For this is the daily bread on which the world lives.

Amen.