

Culham / REEP Easter Calendar 2003

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FOOTWASHING

Jesus washed his disciples feet before the Last Supper, on a day now known as Maundy Thursday.

JESUS WASHES THE DISCIPLES FEET

Before the final meal with his disciples, Jesus poured water into a bowl, kneeled down, washed their feet and then carefully dried them. He was showing that he was servant as well as master.

What did this strange action mean? Footwashing was usually a job for slaves, not the hot of a party! In John's Gospel it says that Jesus '*now showed them the full extent of his love*' (John 13.1). Jesus doesn't lord himself over his followers. Instead he loves, serves and gives himself completely to them.

In verse 15, Jesus says '*I have set you a command that you should do as I do*'. Some people, including church leaders, try to follow this commandment. Every year on Maundy Thursday (the day before Good Friday), the Pope washes the feet of some poor people. The Queen, too, is supposed to do this, although in fact she distributes specially minted 'Maundy Pence' to selected pensioners – one for each year of her reign. What would Jesus have made of that?

Some Baptist churches in America (the 'Old Regular Baptists') was each others' feet on Maundy Thursday, as they once did in England 200 years ago. The equivalent in a school would be the headteacher carefully washing the feet of his or her

PETER

At first, Peter said that Jesus shouldn't wash his feet. Then, when Jesus said that it was important, he said, 'Then don't just wash my feet, but my hands and head as well!'

Peter was a very impulsive character. In pictures of this scene he is often shown with his hand touching his head. It's as if he's saying, '*Well, if you insist on washing my feet, then you may as well wash everything – head and shoulders as well!*' Later, during the last supper, Jesus predicts that Peter will very shortly deny being a friend of his, three times. Peter angrily denies this, saying '*Even if all fall away, I will not.*' (Matthew 14:29). What do you think actually happens?

ANOTHER INCIDENT

Mary Magdalene, Jesus' friend, was in a village called Bethany. It was just before Jesus went into Jerusalem. At a meal there, a woman – maybe Mary Magdalene – poured precious fragrant oil over Jesus' head and wiped his feet with her hair!

Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus, objected. '*Why wasn't this perfume sold, and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages!*'

The anointing at Bethany is a very strange scene. Why did the woman do it? Was it an extravagant act of love and concern? Jesus accepted it and seems to have seen in it a foreshadowing of his own death (after death, the body was anointed with oil). He says, '*Leave her alone.. it was meant that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial.*' (John 12:7)

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You can sympathise with Judas. A year's wages is a lot of money! But if, as Christians believe, Jesus' death and resurrection have cosmic significance, surely it was right to use something so costly. In John's Gospel, Judas is referred to as the disciple who was in charge of their funds. John has a very low opinion of Judas' motives: *'He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief. As keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put in it.'* (John 12.6)

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