

## GOOD FRIDAY DEVOTIONAL SERVICE - 2016

### ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER....

#### INTRO

It's often said that actions speak louder than words: a gesture, a touch, a gift, a deed- symbols of a bigger meaning.

Today we have the chance to remember just a few of the actions done by Jesus and done to Jesus that point to a deeper meaning in his death. Most of them could be seen in the fellowship of the last supper he ate with his friends. It was a supper that could be seen differently if you looked at what happened afterwards. It was a meal ahead of its time: pointing to the deepest fellowship at the table of heaven, friendship, humanity, God's presence restored.

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#### WASHING

The life source – in the beginning the Spirit moved over the face of the waters...God separated water from water and a world was formed. Waters of chaos gave way to water of life and things began to grow. Every river washed a land barren with heat. The One who delights in God's law is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields fruit and never withers.

Jesus walked into water for baptism, walked over water to encourage adventure in his disciples; he turned water into wine and spoke about the water of life.

And that night, at the meal, he took water in a basin and washed feet. He spoke about being clean, properly clean, inside and out, connecting with him.

Feet. You can't get more basic. They stand you up, they move you around, they run and jump and balance and dance and stand poised and ready for action. He washed. Intimate, basic, necessary, lovely, urgent, ugly, humbling.

But it was hands washed the next day. Pilate's hands. His name written down in history forever with the responsibility of condemning Jesus to death, and all the time he tried to show a washing away of it all.

*Wash me and I shall be white as snow*, says the psalmist. Perhaps that's what

Pilate hoped- if he knew the psalms. Perhaps he just hoped. Yet all the scrubbing of soap and water cannot change the facts. He would rather avoid the situation than struggle to know and do the right things.

*You are washed, you are sanctified* - says Paul to his church people who wonder if they are still guilty but need to know they should never take their freedom for granted.

Where do I walk away from my responsibility? Where do I try to claim it was someone else's fault?

Jesus washed feet to clean the body and the soul. Pilate washed his hands of it all and so his guilt remains.

### Washing – what does it say about God's way of loving and mine?

**Lord Jesus, wash my thoughts, my memories, my past grime and guilt and hurt that clings and let me not wash my hands of others who need fair treatment.**

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#### POURING OUT

It was the wine that made them stop. He poured it as he always had. *'Drink it...this is my blood of the new covenant...poured out...for the forgiveness of sins'* Through all those encounters with people he had talked about *'repentance for the forgiveness of sins'* or told people *'Your sins are forgiven'*. It sounds normal now but you used to need to slaughter an animal to know you were forgiven. Jesus just told you that faith and an honest heart did it.

He poured the wine. *Drink it...new covenant...forgiveness.* Forever that drink to be connected to forgiveness and love and faith.

Maybe that's what Mary knew when she poured out the perfume at the meal a few days earlier. A pint of pure nard. That massive extravagance. In front of everyone she literally poured it away. What did the others in the family think? *It's our burial gift!* Maybe it was only right that it was given away. Lazarus had died and been raised. Somehow you couldn't get anything more appropriate than burial oils to offer. Jesus took it. Didn't stop her, didn't smile politely but told the others to leave her alone.

Maybe Mary knew. Maybe Mary was the only one who realised: this is how God loves. He loves wildly, without thought, recklessly, without thought of cost, *'not weighing our merits, but pardoning our offences'*. Pouring out. It said volumes.

Pouring out- wine, perfume. And what about those other scriptures? *Let justice come down as a river and righteousness like a never failing stream... I will pour out my Spirit on all people....I will pour out so much blessing that you won't be able to contain it...* Every prophet had tried to speak about how much God wanted to lavish his goodness on people he loved.

A way of life not depending on the rules; given not worked for. So much blessing....

And there on the cross, the blood seeped out, then flowed when the centurion pierced him. Pouring out. What does it say about God's way of loving- and mine?

***Lord Jesus, pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of love...bless us and flow through us to others. Amen***

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### **TORN**

It emerges so suddenly- the impulse to fight back. I want to protect myself, my friends, my family, my ideals, my precious projects when they are attacked. Of course sometimes I restrain myself and act sensibly, lovingly. Other times I can't help it and it's dishonest to pretend. So I shout, I use cutting, hurtful, sarcasm; I treat others as badly as they treated me; I play games; and occasionally it gets aggressive.

When the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, it was no surprise that his loyal followers wanted to hit back. They had promised to protect and never to leave. And an ear was torn by the sword – and healed by the one they came to hurt.

Torn. He had torn the bread. Taken it, torn it. Nothing out of the ordinary for the host of a meal. But when Jesus tore this bread he said *"This is my body,*

*broken for you. Take it."* Taken and torn.

Jesus was taken. Jesus was torn.

When he stopped acting for others they acted upon him. They took him away, they tore his body with a lash. They had too much respect for possessions to tear his clothing!

*'His heart with sorrow was torn. Yet not my will, but yours, he said' Lord, they said centuries ago, why don't you tear apart the heavens and come down that we might believe in you?*

Instead it was the curtain of the temple that tore. It ripped in two. The heavy, hanging, separating, dividing wall that said 'keep out because you're not worthy, good enough or holy'. Now that statement was torn to shreds from the top of God's heaven, to the bottom of his earth.

No division now. *Once, said Paul, you were far off but now you are brought near...the dividing wall of hostility is broken down.*

*Tearing, torn, taken – what does it say about God's love and mine?*

***Lord Jesus, Once we were far off but you met us in your son and brought us home. Dying and living he declared your love, gave us grace and opened the gate of glory. Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me. Tear away what is wrong and take what I have so that divisions may be mended.***

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### **THEY WENT OUT....**

It is so normal that it hardly makes us pause to think. *'They went out'* It says that at the end of the meal when they had sung a hymn they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Of course some people have little choice – they can't go out because there's no one to take them and no energy to manage alone.

But most of us go out very often. Just sometimes it's good to stay in. We'd rather not face work or people or noise or busyness or effort.

Jesus went out to the Mount of Olives, knowing he would be on his way to death. He went out, willingly. There was no avoidance of difficulty.

When Judas went out after supper, earlier in the meal, *it was night*, says the gospel. The statement about evil put in such ordinary terms. *It was night* - well it would be, wouldn't it, because they were having supper? No, Judas brought darkness, brought an attempt to put out the light. When Judas went, he went away with a harmful purpose in mind. I can go out that way, too. I can go out angry, unhelpful, resentful, intent on my own purposes, without love.

Adam and Eve went away to hide once they realised how badly wrong it had all begun to be. They went away from God. *How long will you hide your face from me?* Writes David in the Psalms. It seems as if God has gone away. Who goes- God or myself? Who brings the night?

Jesus went out. Went outside. And the next day, on the hill, outside the city wall, he was crucified. Outside – outside the place of blessing, outside the place of grace, outside the place of fellowship and company and love. It was outside the city wall that the animal sacrifices would be dragged and burnt. No longer fit for the holy places. We can treat people like that today. We can hold people distant from us, separate from the great and supposedly good.

The irony is that Jesus was the one person who *was* fit for the holy places. He died outside, and showed that no one else is outside his reach.

Judas went out and it was night.

Jesus went out refusing to avoid the darkness, to bring light to people who felt God was hidden or that they were too ashamed to look.

**'They went out' – for what? What does it say about God's love and mine**

**Lord Jesus, when I go out, let it not be to darkness or hiding but light and love.**