

Maundy Thursday 2025

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I do not like to work with patients who are in love...Love and psychotherapy are fundamentally incompatible. The good therapist fights darkness and seeks illumination, while romantic love is sustained by mystery and crumbles upon inspection.

So begins Irvin Yalom in his book *Love's Executioner*. For the reason that he outlined above, he finds that in his work of psychotherapy he often – at least initially – can become that. But, during the course of the book he gives examples of the complexity of the therapeutic relationship, most of which turn out to be thoroughly life-giving. Despite love, that pesky force, getting in the way.

Of course, what we each know from experiences of falling into or out of love, or from love received from other people, is indeed that love's effect on the body, mind, even soul is great. There is almost no part of our beings that can be untouched by it: from butterflies of initial attraction, to finding that place of security, happiness, comfort. Homeliness, even.

It is no wonder that the work of the psychotherapist is thwarted by its ability to undo reason, infect motive, drive passion. For the external, the rational, approaching this minefield there is much to be concerned with. And in particular how the force of love can be understood when

it eats away from the inside, which is the danger of being given to love.

Tonight, the actions of Jesus are motivated by the love that comes from Love, the source of all being and goodness. And it is no coincidence that we use the language of love to describe the driving force of God.

It is similarly powerful, it undoes the rational, redirects the motive of the world's momentum, and leads to the passion that we enter with Jesus today.

In the washing of feet Christ becomes a servant, not to the worldly needs of his friends – although he does tend to those. But his subservience is under greed, pride, power. For the powerful to be on the mud-strewn floor, caressing feet covered in dust, excrement, detritus of all sorts, he demonstrates a foolish love. This love is not the sort that can be negotiated with or understood. It cannot be helped or alleviated. It is a fulsome, all-giving expression that cannot be matched.

When Christ eats bread, and shares his cup, he plays host not to those at his table, but those who will never be invited to such a meal. His body is broken, shared; his blood shed, offered. The bread and the wine are the material of this, made ready at the meal. But in fact, it is a sacrifice beyond sacrifice, knowing that even as he dips the bread, the one who will give him up for a meagre fee will dip his too. Jesus, here, is hosting not 12 men around the table, but rather, the forgotten, the captive, the oppressed, the subjected, the abused, the despised.

Because it is to them that Christ's table is most liberatingly
invitational.

It is to us. We are the people, who come here seeking food, seeking
refuge, seeking for the loves of our lives to be made good and
understood as we understand them. We are the ones who come to
Jesus tonight, begging that he would make us clean, pleading with
him to share that banquet to satisfy us.

And his greeting is that of love. His greeting is a love that demands
everything. Love is costly. Love always has a price. To love is to give,
and to be loved it to share everything.

Jesus demonstrates this most irrational, passionate, love and he gives
everything for us. And in turn, we are asked to give back.

In the garden, Jesus will ask of his friends, those whose feet he has
held and mouths he has filled. 'Wait, watch, just one hour.' And they
fail. We fail.

Because at the heart of any relationship of love is the sense that we are
not worthy of that love. We do not deserve to be known this well, and
still desired, still cared for, still cleansed, and fed, and adored.

Their eyes grow heavy, as do their hearts, because to be so loved
makes no sense. The one thing Christ asks of his friends is too much.

Passion means suffering. Because the heart giving so much is almost
unbearable. This is where the passions of our lives intersect the
passion of our Lord.

As we tonight fight darkness and seek illumination, we find there a
confusing, bewildering, dazzling obscurity. The love of Our Lord for
us, as for his disciples, makes no sense. Just as we never deserve the
love we need on earth, we deserve not the love of Jesus.

And yet he gives it, unceasingly, extravagantly. All he asks in return,
but not as a condition is that we will watch with him.

We now step across the threshold and into the seemingly terminal
dusk of these three days. And Jesus asks us to watch, to wait.

So now I invite you, to open your hearts to the vulnerability of giving
yourselves. And here, we might find in the gloom a love greater than
any human love; eternal, unquenchable.

More irrational, more passionate.