

Maundy Thursday – 29 March 2018  
John 13:1-7, 31b-35

Last week I had the privilege of spending Wednesday evening and Thursday morning at a Clergy Quiet Day with guest speaker, Bishop Mark McDonald. Bishop Mark is the Bishop for the Indigenous Peoples of the Anglican Church of Canada. He is a gentle and faithful man who lives his beliefs with integrity, and most importantly, with incredible hope and it was his hope that had the greatest impact on me – an impact that I am still, a week later, trying to understand.

Bp Mark is a member of the Aboriginal community. Before he came to serve in Canada, he was the Bishop of Alaska for 10 years. He worked with communities that knew the fears of becoming lost. Their communities were getting smaller, their resources dwindling. Today he works with Aboriginal communities in Canada that have no running water; communities in which teenage suicide has become an epidemic. He is walking alongside Anglicans who are struggling to find identity in a country and a National Church that is only now beginning to recognize the hard work that needs to be done by Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals alike in the light of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's findings and National Calls to Action. As an Aboriginal himself, Bp Mark is a walking example of what it is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ in a world that no longer acknowledges Jesus' supremacy.

During his talks, Bp Mark shared with us some thoughts on the former world movement of Imperialism and Colonialism. Once upon a time, those who were in power and wielded control, deemed it best that the world become civilized, which also meant Christianized. And hence, here we are, Anglicans seemingly since time immemorial, or at least sometimes it seems that way. But the truth is that a new movement has pushed out the colonialism that brought us to this place, at this time, one, which is threatening to take over the world, and is doing quite well. We no longer look to the Golden Rule or variations thereof. We now exist surrounded by rules of economy and finance. If it's good for the bottom line, then it is correct and right. The question becomes: whose bottom line? And we find ourselves with a lack of people in power asking the question: what about those who fall below the bottom line? In today's world the *economy overshadows humanity*.

Where does this new economy-driven imperialism leave us as Christians, and as Anglicans, when our very Baptismal Vows call us to be God's stewards taking care of humanity?

It leaves us sitting around a table that few understand, breaking bread with Jesus who is willing to give up his life, even though the world around us would call him a fool.

We are found allowing another to wash our feet, not just as a reminder to her that she is called to serve, but that we are all called to follow Jesus' example, as she is, in service to others, whoever and wherever they might be.

We are found preparing to strip this church, and then ourselves, of all of the pretensions, adornments, distractions that pull our focus away from Jesus who is doing all of this for us. As our worship space is stripped bare that we might better

come face to face with the barrenness of Jesus on the cross, we are called upon to bare our own souls, starting with our lives, our desires, our fixations, that we might be bared enough that Christ will then be able to clothe us anew in his peace, his forgiveness, his mercy ...

Where does this new economy-driven imperialism leave us? It leaves us standing on the margins, looking in at a world that needs Jesus desperately. It leaves us with the truth that we are called, more so now than ever before, to share Jesus with the world.

In light of those who went before us, in the name of the Church, to Christianize and civilize those who were here before us, how do we reconcile *our* call to bring Jesus to the world?

The difference between then and now is what our intention is and how we are called to go about it.

As Christians expected to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in our own communities, we are not going to shame others for what they believe. We are not called to convince those we speak to that their ways are wrong. We are not called to put people up on a cross, condemning them for who they are. Jesus already went to the cross so that no one else would have to.

We *are* called to be *in relationship* with people and to show them what we believe by how we live, the decisions we make, by what enchants us and holds us close as we live a life of faith in Jesus Christ. We are not to *conquer* people into faith. Rather we are called to *love* them into faith – just as Jesus has loved us into faith.

As we gather in a post-Christendom world, we should not be angry that others no longer believe as we do. We should be excited that we are in a position to share with those who are being marginalized in other ways the good news that in Jesus all are welcome and none are excluded.

Earlier I stated that Bp Mark is a walking example of what it is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ in a world that no longer acknowledges Jesus' supremacy.

The Bishop is an Aboriginal priest serving in a society in which so many of his Aboriginal brothers and sisters abhor everything he stands for because of what was done in the name of the Church, and the God, he serves. Bp Mark could simply say that it's too hard to reach them when they do not want what he has to offer. He could walk away from those who need him the most but he doesn't. He sees Jesus Christ as the gift that they haven't yet realized they can choose to open. He doesn't push his faith on them. He simply lives it with integrity. He doesn't proselytize to bring people to God and tell them they need to worship the way he does. He invites them to come into relationship with him so that they can learn of his beliefs and they can share theirs with him. And together they grow – sometimes into the faith and sometimes not. The choice is always theirs.

As an Aboriginal priest and bishop, Mark MacDonald stands in the midst of those who have been hurt by other priests and bishops but he brings with him the message of peace, forgiveness, mercy and new hope. Not all will listen. Not all will be able to hear him, yet. But there is always a chance that someone might hear his message to the Aboriginal community with an open mind and an open heart.

.....And just think what would happen if he simply didn't try because maybe people wouldn't hear?

You and I are like Mark MacDonald in the world. We are Christians with a message of peace, forgiveness, mercy and new hope. But we are standing, like Jesus in the courtyard of Pontius Pilate, like Mark MacDonald and all of the Aboriginal priests who witness in Aboriginal communities that are still in need of healing, in a world that has pushed us to the margins but need us more now than ever before.

We can't be afraid to invite them to the table to break bread with Jesus, even if it means that we invite them to our table first. We can't be afraid of offering to wash their feet, even if it means starting with the offer to give them a lift home first. We can't be afraid of stripping ourselves bare spiritually that they might see the essence of our faith, even if it means beginning with sharing with them first a little bit about who we really are.

We are each disciples of Jesus Christ in a world that no longer acknowledges Jesus for who he is and what he has given to the world. We have been marginalized and pushed to the side. What we can do as faithful disciples breaking bread here this evening, having our feet washed, allowing our souls to be stripped of all that is peripheral to our faith, is to celebrate that no longer do we need to uphold the pretense that we are at the center of the world Jesus wants us to reach. We have been freed up to reach those who have also been marginalized for different reasons and we have been given that mandate that Jesus gave his disciples on that Thursday so long ago:

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

This night we are reminded of that mandate and as we live through Good Friday and awaken through the Easter Vigil, we are called to our new Christian status as marginal in the world that we, like those first disciples, might also reach out to the marginalized to bring them the Good News of peace, forgiveness, mercy and new hope.

In a world that has stripped the Christian community of traditional power, you may discover that this marginalized position you inhabit is more powerful than anything else, simply because you have been freed up to serve and stripped bare of those things that would hold you back.

So go - go out into the world to love and serve the Lord and do it with just who you are stripped bare of pretense, carrying only the bread that you break and the towel with which you will wash another's feet.