

Maundy Thursday sermon, 14 April 2022

Children Experiencing Easter got to clean one of their own shoes and then were given the choice whether to clean their neighbour's shoe. One of the loveliest things for me was how excited most of the children were to do that, how much fun they had – lots of giggling going on. When I asked them what they would think of various important people cleaning their shoes – their teacher, the primeminister, the queen – they loved the idea. Children find it, on the whole, quite easy to accept help (except for when they're going through that phase where they absolutely insist they must do everything for themselves, which I guess is all part of growing up).

And it's true of course, we do have to learn how to do things for ourselves, but I wonder if somehow in learning how to 'adult' as the young people say, we can lose something vital in the process.

Can you remember, I wonder, what it felt like as a child to be absolutely heartbroken about something or to fall over and hurt yourself, and to then experience the comforting hug of an adult? The bandaged knee, the soothing words, the cookie and other special treatment? It was almost worth the injury or rejection to feel that wonderful security and love. But we can only experience that comfort and closeness if we are prepared to be vulnerable, to risk ourselves, to risk exposure and, yes, possibly rejection.

The researcher/writer Brené Brown says that it is those who are prepared to admit their vulnerabilities and to courageously risk their inner selves to others who lived the most wholehearted, fulfilled lives.

The one who completely exemplified this, of course, is Jesus. Jesus made himself vulnerable, to both the authorities, but also to his friends, some of whom would misunderstand him, abandon him, deny him and betray him. I tell you I have never in my life experienced a more exquisite and lingering pain than the betrayal and rejection of someone I considered a friend. That is loss upon loss; not just loss of a friendship, but loss of something foundational, loss of not just who you thought your friend was, but who you thought you were. You think to yourself, 'If they can reject me, there must be something wrong with me, something intrinsically unlovable'.

That kind of hurt and damage can affect us over a lifetime if we let it. It can make us hard and brittle. Unwilling to risk rejection ever again, we put up walls and barriers that make us invulnerable, or so we think. Because cutting ourselves off from the possibility of pain also cuts us off from the possibility of growth, of resurrection, new life.

Are you prepared to be vulnerable? Are you prepared to let people see what you need and serve you as Jesus served the disciples? Jesus showed us that even if the worst happens and we experience rejection or something unhelpful, everything is redeemable. Everything. Was Jesus afraid? Probably. We know he felt things deeply. But he offered himself anyway knowing that he could trust the Father/Mother. Can we too dare to trust?

Amen