

Alnmouth study week – 3rd-7th October 2011
Franciscan Service to a Damaged World
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Our Foundation:

Defining Franciscan Service.

The Principles - Day Three calls Tertiaries *to serve the world and their communities by following the example of Jesus.*

The Principles - Day Seven confirms *service as the search to breakdown barriers between nations, communities and people.*

The Principles - Day Nineteen defines *service as the acceptance of Jesus' example who took the form of a servant.*

The Principles – Day Twenty confirms *service reflects Christ's love whose beauty and power as the inspiration and joy of life.*

The Principles -Day Twenty Two confirms *service is Christ the example, emptied of self service through humility. Who encourages us to serve with the same humility.*

The issues:

Daily the media report a fractured world. As a litany of disaster; earthquake; tsunami; flood; civil war; violence; abuse of citizens rights; neglect; unemployment; debt; increased living costs; drug abuse; family breakdown. Consistently, the weak; marginalised and maligned face discrimination and exploitation. Lack of understanding divides individuals of all ages. Respect appears in short supply, as society's drivers focus on idealising the individual ego. Western culture aggrandised the self; whilst accentuating the material world reduces care and concern for humankind. This devaluation of individuals defines the hard edge marking the depth of our broken world. The exponential change of social value starkly focuses on relationship breakdown, accentuating a systematic reduction of communication between people. Misunderstanding multiply; when human interaction reduces; subsumed by lengthening working hours and increased indirect communication through the world wide web.

Where next?

Society's problems are apparent, resulting from its injured nature. Despair is one feature, which accentuates feelings that individuals can do little to make a difference. We need to accept that the media may be biased in the way they use information they gather. The mindset to find a way through and relate The Principles to the wider world requires reorientation of ourselves into the way of service by full appreciation of Jesus' ministry of servanthood.

Jesus our Template?

Jesus' teaching provided truth to the first disciples; we have to rediscover the Word's significance for our generation. However, there are times when hearing the Scriptures brings with it, familiarity, deadening their significance and impact. We need to rediscover the power of these words to fully experience the reality of this servant ministry.

Finding our depth in Jesus care for our lost world?

Feeling overwhelmed with weakness in the face of all these issues and problems. Requires our facing the complexity of individuals' lostness, with that clear assurance of Jesus' presence in each circumstance. Confident that Jesus knows us fully, we are able to wonder at the surety of being held close in loving arms. Through this great privilege we can respond, constantly holding to this surpassing love that permeates through all we undertake. Daily blessed by being fully known; is our faith's foundation, strengthening us in all that we face. The ground of our being is unsurpassed love which deeply refreshes us in service.

Refreshing our understanding of Service.

Scripture renews our understanding of the depth joy in Jesus' ministry found in the Gospel of John 10 verses 11 to 18. This text forms part of what is often described as the Book of Signs which covers the portion of the Gospel from John 1 verse 19 to John 12 verse 50. These episodes reveal the public ministry of Jesus; reporting a series of signs and discourses at festivals unveiling the deeper meaning of his ministry. Provoking in some a crisis of faith, with resultant divisions over the true nature of Jesus ministry, within those who heard him. These texts also look forward to the future ministry of the church.

John 10 verses 11 to 18.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I receive from my Father".

Historic shepherd ministry.

The imagery of these verses form part of the continued series of festival sermons and controversies. That reveals Jesus identity, work and his heavenly mission. The festival of Hanukkah is referred to in John 10 verses 26 to 27. The central Hanukkah theme is prefaced in verses 11 to 18. Ezekiel 34 verses 1 to 10 remind us of the powerful criticism reserved for false shepherds that formed the foundation of Hanukkah. This season was one in which hard questions are asked about failed leadership and false shepherds as Israel remembered the failed temple leadership during Maccabean times.

Jesus steps into the Old Testament tradition as he describes himself as the good shepherd; echoing Ezekiel 34 verses 11 to 16. We cannot sentimentalize the image; this is not about cuddly lambs! This shepherd is a person tough; passionate; the shepherd is totally committed to the sheep, this is contrasted with hired hand's lack of care for the sheep. John 10 verse 17 mirrors verse 15 both reveals the depth of Jesus' sovereign choice. Love sprung from the eternal relationship of the Son with the Father, anticipating the wider scope of his ministry to reach the world.

The true Shepherd - a life voluntarily laid down.

The Shepherd, Jesus' image was well known to his audience. The most startling image here is the intimacy of the shepherd with the sheep. This knowledge is mutual and exhaustive. The good shepherd concentrates fully on care for the sheep, the shepherd willingly lays down life for them. This mirrors the Father's knowledge the Son and the Son's knowledge of the Father. The ultimate expression of this relationship is the Son's life laid down. This love shows the Son has the authority of the Father therefore, in that authority will take life up again. No one takes life from the Son; the Son freely lays life down. The Son fully accepts the commandment of the Father. At the same time, the authority of the Son glorifies the Father. This unique love and intimacy between Father and Son is the model for the relationship between Jesus and the flock. The hallmark of Jesus union with the Father's will and expression of the love they share together.

The importance of words

It is important to understand the depth of the meaning behind these words. When Jesus speaks of life laid aside; the word used is **tithathi** and for taking up life again the word used is **lambano**. The Gospel writer very specifically chooses these words. We must not brush over the power of these words. The sovereign God who suggests inclusiveness with the flock implies also the unity of the church, so also unexpected and different sheep are included. The marginalised are included, so the flock will never be homogenised or exclusive. The vision of unity smashes all divisions of race, culture and economic situation, reflects Jesus' divine sovereignty. Therefore his people's responsibility is not to fail in reconciliation, ensuring that the activity of God is never diminished.

The image of the Servant – who is confident in humility to lay down and take up

The final aspect of Jesus' uniqueness as the good shepherd is his authority - not only to die for the sheep but also to take up his life in resurrection. This is no afterthought; in which God rescues his Son from an unexpected tragedy. The empty tomb is encompassed in the plan of Golgotha. Authoritative and powerful, in harmony within the ultimate relationship.

John 13 verses 2 to 17

“The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God, so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that he wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, Lord, are you going to wash my feet? Jesus replied, You do not realise now what I am doing, but later you will understand. No, said Peter, you will never wash my feet. Jesus answered, A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you. For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean. When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. Do you understand what I have done for you? He asked them. You call me Teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell

you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them”.

Ultimate Service

The section of John's Gospel from John 13 verse 1 to John 20 verse 31 has been termed the Book of Glory. In which the emphasis shifts to the more private ministry of Jesus, we hear what Jesus says to his disciples. Jesus teaches the disciples that he must die on the cross, a foundational part of this discourse is highlighted in John 13 verse 6 to 10. These verses are a call to be fully part of Jesus, giving over control to follow the way of everlasting love. The events recorded here prefigure and parallel Jesus sacrifice on the cross. Providing the example for the disciples to imitate within service to the community and the wider world. Jesus washes the disciples' feet knowing his origins, destiny and authority, anchored in his assured relationship with God.

The Servant Master

Again the powerful words **tithathi** and **lambano** appear in John 13 verse 4; “Without warning Jesus rose from supper laid aside- **tithathi** - his garments, took a towel and tied it round himself poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples feet”. Jesus deeply shocks all present, as Rabbi and leader; Jesus is the last person in the room who would be expected to take the role of a slave. Behind the words, the disciples’ shock is palpable, in this knife-edge brittle silence, Jesus calmly continues washing each of disciples' feet in turn. We are familiar with the agonised response of Peter to Jesus actions. Those words are filled with shock, tearing to ribbons the stunned silence that envelops all as Jesus undertakes this office of the lowest slave. When Jesus had washed every disciples feet; John 13 verses 12 to 17; “Jesus took up- **lambano** - his garments and reclined again”. With hindsight these words prefigured to the disciples and also to subsequent readers, the events of the resurrection.

The Master's Servants

The depth of the disciples’ shock is the clear; yet Jesus further stuns the disciples, as Jesus asks them if they understood what he, Jesus, had done for them. Jesus confirms the disciple were right to address Jesus as Rabbi, Teacher and Lord. Jesus makes an even more shocking point that, if - therefore, their Teacher and Lord has washed their feet. Then, the disciples also ought to wash each others feet, taking the role of the lowest slave to all. Jesus intimate example and servant actions turn the disciples world upside down. Jesus underlined this reorientation saying, “*Truly, I tell you a slave is not greater than their Lord nor is the one sent greater than the sender*”. Jesus tells the disciples that, “*if they know these things, they are blessed if they do them*”. Likewise we are called to serve one another with humility.

The essence of Penitential Service

John 13 verses 12 to 20 displays in intimate detail, practical, penitential service. Fully focuses on menial task to satisfy the needs of others, shows true depth of service and personal sacrifice, which in the light of the cross; reflects the true meaning of Easter.

The Lord of the disciples is the obedient Son and Servant of the Father.

John 13 verse 8 includes being obedient to death on the cross; the humble acceptance by faith is the gift of Christ's sacrifice. The disciples are made clean by accepting Jesus death, this gracious act of service, indicates deep love which is understood by care for the community. There was to be no distinction between Jesus and disciples in this service. This servant gift of the Master accepts that all humanity's need for same service.

The Master's betrayer?

We must remember the betrayer is included, the foot washing which is not accidental, but sacrificial and costly service offered in complete humility to humanity. The betrayer has a place in the heart of Jesus right up to the very end. A witness to the disciples, that love and sacrificial witness to the Master is fully inclusive. Inviting the disciples to lay aside all rank and preference, to meet others needs. This radically differs from the world's view, where service and concern for the weak, powerless is considered demeaning. Disciples are called to fully understand this witness as faith's character and concern. This sacrificial love voluntarily lays down life for the specific purpose of service in order to take life up again. Remaining the true extent of love and life in all its fullness, obediently choosing death, Jesus controls the situation. Judas was included to the end within this service, leaving open the opportunity to be fully part of salvation. Jesus never closes the door to anyone to be fully part of himself; this is Love's Way.

The Depth of Love

The words used are very relevant in underlining the depth of meaning of this teaching. John 10 verses 15; 17 and 18 use the word - **tithathi** - Expressing the way life is laid down or laid aside. Again in John 10 verse 18 uses the word - **lambano** - expresses the way life is taken up, or offered up. Their reappearance in John 13:verse 4 - **tithathi** - and John 13 verse 12 - **lambano** - shows by the link between the verses and the true depth of these most carefully selected words. Indicating the force and shock of the actions of Jesus and his expectation for disciples. Poignantly clear as Jesus washed the feet of Judas making him as much a part of himself as the other disciples. Even when Judas was hovering on the dark side; so determined to prevent Jesus from moving away from the style of warrior Messianic ideal which clearly Judas holds so dear. Results in the devastating events as Judas is fully consumed by the dark. It is clear that in the face of such extravagant humility, the disciples are also to serve humbly. These events are intended to be life changing for the disciples were a step too far for Judas.

The Continuing Challenge of Love

We must be honest about the disciples' shock in order to respond to Jesus' challenge in the present age. These events are well known, we must not forget their power as they become ours through accepting a life poured out in servanthood that brings everlasting life.

The Invitation

Jesus displays a depth of care and concern which can be forbidding. The love of Jesus within obedience to the will of God was unreserved. This intimacy of mutual knowledge remains inexhaustible; through understanding the relationship of Father and Son; mirrors the intimacy of Jesus with the disciples. Such profound commitment to love shows dependence on and obedience to God's will as the hallmark of true faith. Each person is

invited, just as the disciples were invited, to be part of Jesus. Jesus shows the full extent of his authoritative power in harmony with God's authority and divine nature.

And now?

Today is always the day of decision – the opportunity to experience spiritual cleansing. The moral mandate of humble service anchored in the assurance of God's love. Not a comfortable experience as Jesus' redemption, cleansing, spirit makes the cross real for the disciples. In hindsight, the inclusion of Judas in Jesus' sacrificial work is shocking. Especially within the scope of this supreme token of overwhelming love. Emphases and highlights the divine light of self giving love as the natural feature of the community who imitate Jesus' willing sacrifice, cleansing our manifold sins by the cross.

Misconceptions

We need to be aware of Judas horror and the way his misconceptions led to his choice of darkness in order to demonstrate Jesus quality of love. Jesus work on our behalf is the start of the pilgrimage whose beginnings are in the overwhelming encounter with the depth of God's goodness that never fades. This inexhaustible love freely given is grounded in the concrete strength of God's presence, which joyfully remains the most profound testimony, greater than truth. This radical faithful, genuine love is shared and disciples are asked to imitate Jesus, thereby, accept obligation to invest in others because Christ invests in the disciples including Judas.

The Franciscan Answer.

The Principles Day Twenty-Two - The First Note – Humility. *He always keep before us the example of Christ, who emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and who, on the last night of his life, humbly washed his disciples feet.*

Foot washing is foreign to us, although; it has been reintroduced in the Pentecostal tradition. We need to be aware of the unintended responses today which were never part of the original setting.

The words **lambano** and **tithathi**, so carefully chosen by the Gospel writer, need to be at the root of our desire to be Third Order Franciscans. They are the meaning of life; where there is hurt and threats to unity. This mindset must remain a common dedication throughout The Society of St Francis to our Lord Jesus Christ. It is our highest calling and work to repair from within. This antidote to fear, superstition and threat, becomes a threat some so by appearing to be divergent from our personal predilections. This “laying down and taking up” remains our first calling and the strength of our Franciscan spirituality to seek growth and heal through affliction for all, especially to the marginalised. As we adhere to all aspects of The Principles, we have an obligation to be a resource not only to the church; we are part of - but to the wider church, local wider community in which we live and society as a whole. If we accept this call of God as individual Tertiaries and as an Order. We can offer this poverty to all as we allow ourselves to be transformed in the discipline of The Principles.

In the light of this profound sacrificing love that cuts through every meagre act, transforming the mundane into radiant light. Our world, church and community remain cloaked in many shades of darkness and light. Nothing astonishes our fractured world so much as a community which is radical and faithful. Where genuine love is shared among its members mandated by faith. A community of love, the followers of Christ who invest in others because Christ has invested love in them. Never based on mutuality or attractiveness but on Christ who washed the feet of everyone including Judas. This

foundation of the life of faith which attends the journey within our Franciscan calling. In the face of the challenges in both the church and society today, are we willing to continue seeking reconciliation?

Striving to draw the tender drops of in our current culture, society and relationships, no matter the cost. Such drops of unconditional love always open up new challenges the vistas of faith, but also include sacrifice closely wrapped in our faith relationship with God. Our journey as part of The Third Order Society of St Francis community remains our unique service to al around us.

In the light of lambano and tithathi dare we dare to serve, emptied of all that holds us to the ego of self, and have courage to replace this for others sake through the sacrificial way of Jesus our Saviour?

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