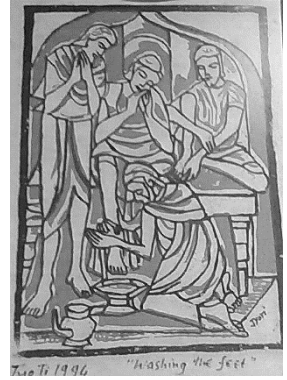


## John 14: 1-14 – *Hands, Homes and Prayers*

Sermon for 10/05/20 – Christian Aid Sunday – by Rev Phil Wootton

I want to focus on three things that may already have more than their fair share of our attention at the moment: our hands, our homes and our prayers.

**Our Hands:** Have a look at your hands. Have a good look. They may be cleaner than you've ever known them, with so much regular and thorough hand-washing to prevent virus transmission. They may, like mine, be becoming dried and flaky. Nevertheless, hands are the most remarkable tools – with a combination of strength, flexibility and functionality that robotics engineers can only dream of replicating in their creations. In days of physical distancing some functions get less use: the caring touch is severely restrained. But we celebrate the hands of medics to bring healing and comfort, as are the hands of those who stack shelves, deliver groceries, and show loving care to neighbours.



In Christian Aid Week, many of us normally use our hands for delivering envelopes and ringing doorbells. We can't do that this year, but our global neighbours still have the same and greater needs. So, how can we still reach out virtual hands around the world? Many of these neighbours live in cramped and over-crowded living conditions without adequate hand-washing facilities: how can they be safe from infection? Christian Aid works with partners in Bangladesh amongst the 150,000 Rohingya refugees at Cox's Bazaar, as well as with the host population. A third of these households don't even have soap, so Christian Aid's workers and partners are distributing 50,000 basic hygiene kits as well as building hand-washing stations.

Our Gospel reading from John 14 follows closely on from Jesus' action of washing his disciples' feet. He served them with his hands in the most humble of ways, taking them totally by surprise, communicating love. How can we surprise someone else with an unexpected act of love today?

**Our Homes:** The lockdown has meant a lot more time at home for many of us. Some are relaxed with this; others are screaming to get out. Some are fed up with the sight of four walls; others get satisfaction from undertaking long-awaited DIY jobs or the most thorough spring-clean ever. We give thanks for our homes, and spare thoughts, prayers and money for those who have no satisfactory places to live. Overcrowding is a massive problem associated with poverty, and provides the conditions for disease to spread unchecked. Christian Aid works in many of these places. One such is Bomo State in north east Nigeria, where some 48,000 displaced people are dependent for basic provisions. At the time of writing, Covid-19 has not yet arrived, but there's a short time-frame to raise people's awareness and put all possible precautions in place.

'Dwelling' is one of the key themes of John's Gospel. Remember from chapter 1 how 'the Word become flesh and *dwelled* among us.' Now Jesus speaks of a heavenly 'dwelling place' – 'mansion' in the older Bible translations: there is room for all in God's house. It's a promise that brings great comfort and hope at times when inevitably we face thoughts about our own mortality. It also makes us think again about our earthly dwelling places: how can they be outposts or way-stations of heaven? If churches – often called God's house – are closed, then our homes are our places of prayer. Some people have spoken of making them a 'spiritual retreat house' or 'a kind of hermitage.' (It might be a strange picture for those with young children bouncing off the walls!) In verse 23 of John 14 Jesus says, 'Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.' That will be a beautiful dwelling place indeed.

**Our Prayers:** Today's reading ended in verse 14 and the most bold and extraordinary claim from Jesus: 'You may ask anything in my name, and I will do it.' This is a great encouragement to pray. We might even display it in our home-monastery! But equally, we may find these hard words to hold on to at the moment – hard to reconcile with prayers that have seemingly gone unanswered in these difficult times. We may want to shout back at Jesus, 'I have prayed with all my heart, but the one I prayed for was not healed.'

There are no simple, satisfactory or complete answers, but as we wrestle with these words, we need to keep in mind the context of the Gospel story. Jesus did not make this promise at a happy time when it seemed nothing could go wrong. He'd just been talking about disciples betraying him and denying knowing him, and he'd go on himself to be arrested, beaten and executed. His disciples must have prayed that this horror would stop. It didn't stop, but still they reported his promise. They remembered Jesus by this promise when he was no longer be them in the flesh. They learnt how important it is to bring every concern, every cause, every request to him to be shared with him and their burden borne by him. Jesus himself refused to pray for deliverance from his hour of suffering. Rather he prayed for courage, for God's will to be done, and that he might glorify God through it.

Jesus instructed his followers both to 'pray in my name' and to 'go in my name.' To pray and to go are intimately connected. Prayer is not just for when we are helpless, but to inspire us and direct us in the doing of the Father's will and the bringing in of his kingdom. Today we learn about the needs of the wider world and the work of Christian Aid. As we learn, we pray, and as we pray, we are inspired to act. For most of us, that action will be our own giving and our encouragement of others to give. So, please, give as generously as you can and help Christian Aid carry God's love across the world today.