

'A new Commandment I give unto you' - John 13.34.

Most of us have some fetish, some peculiarities which we quite like to indulge, much to the amusement or shock of other people. The Churchwarden here thinks I suffer from OCD after we cleaned out the vestry together.

In reality, I have a fetish about shoes and because of this I am delighted to live within striking distance of Northampton, once the centre of the shoe trade and still sporting remnants of that business. So imagine my glee when I found the exact spot in Kettering to have my best shoes repaired! Not content to post them back to the factory, I took them personally - but I was disappointed. Instead of finding an imposing and ancient factory complex, the Sat Nav. told us to pull up outside a very plain building: no banner signs; no flashy advertisements; one small brass plate on a plain wooden door.

The door led into a cubby-hole, out of which peered a secretary who immediately took control. She wouldn't allow us any further into the factory but she did summon a friendly foreman who told us a bit about the factory and its changed circumstances. Once it employed 500 workers; now there were 50.

Yes, it was an unimposing building but within it was a concentration of shoe-making expertise which is the envy off the world, stretching back many generations. I could confidently leave my best shoes to be repaired knowing that they would do all in their means to make them as new once more.

Tonight, in this imposing building, we concentrate on what I hope we do best: the expression of love. It comes in many forms: partnership, trust, sharing, joy in one another's company and that unique gift which Christianity gives to our culture, forgiveness. Of course we are not yet perfect. This is work in progress. Unlike the shoe factory, these gifts are difficult to hand down but rather inherited and fanned into life by mutual example and encouragement.

We meet to celebrate The Eucharist together on the anniversary of its Institution by Jesus at The Last Supper. And what did Jesus do? He shared himself. He gave himself away! 'This is my body', he said. 'This is my blood. Do this to re-member me, *to reconstitute me, to identify with me*'. These words we know so well, we repeat them Sunday by Sunday; we probably know them by heart. They are words: powerful words but nevertheless, words.

St. John, in our gospel tonight, doesn't repeat those words. His account of the Last Supper is all action. In the middle of supper, he gets up, puts on a towel and washes the feet of his disciples.

This was astonishing even for Jesus. In any household, the steward would be the person who makes things happen. He had some status. But Jesus took the job of the lowly slave – who had no status except to wash feet.

Is this then what we need to do? Well, yes. How do we serve the world except by humble acts of love? St. Francis sent out his friars, telling them to preach the gospel. 'Use words if necessary' he said.

Some of you will be watching the current programme on the Camino with an assorted group of believers, agnostics and atheists travelling together with the usual discussion. However, what got them all excited on their journey was an old man giving away sticks free of charge and a little later on, a vineyard giving away free wine, as much as they could drink! Here is the generosity of God which oils the wheels of faith in the world.

There are so many examples of loving service in our villages, mostly submerged under the ordinariness of life events. They surface among neighbours, in the community shop, in political or civic service and much of it flows out from our centres of faith excellence. I frequently think of the Barrowden Community Shop as a wonderful model for our churches: entirely there to serve. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote from his prison cell: "The Church is the Church only when it exists for others...not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others."

'A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another as I have loved you'.
Amen.