

So, what's your excuse then?

Can't think of one quick enough? No worries! With our new wi-fi equipped St Mary Beddington you can quickly get your browser up on your phone, Google 'best excuses' and choose the one that suits. Isn't the internet great? You don't even have to *think* any more.

So, what's your excuse then?

Here's some I found online earlier:

*"My *insert pet choice* just threw up, I think I need to stay home and make sure they're ok."*

"I must have eaten something off, I have an upset tummy."

*"I totally forgot about *insert fictional relative* coming into town and I have to clean the house."*

*"I pulled my calf muscle this morning at *insert hard sounding gym class*"*

*"I have a *insert fake pic* flat tire !"*

Coincidentally, these are all excuses that have been offered to me by someone for not coming to church. Perhaps you've been on the same web sites as me. Perhaps the web sites just reflect how similar we are really are.

Excuses I haven't heard yet, but fully expect to before I retire:

*"I saw a photo of *insert ex-boyfriend's name* on Facebook and just need to be alone right now."*

*"My boss won't get off my back, I have to have to *insert something important* by tomorrow morning."*

*"I'm ovulating and *insert partners name* really wants to try for a baby."*

I wonder if anyone's tried that one to get out of a Clergy Study Day. Just a thought...

Anyway, though I appreciate politeness: ultimately, you don't need an excuse for not coming to church, you don't need to explain your absence, at least not to me.

But, if not here, we will always need excuses. We need excuses for ourselves because we can never be what we want to be, we need excuses for others because we can

never live up to their expectations. Whatever our ideal is we will never be it, and nor will anyone we ever know be theirs.

We are a turmoil of conflicting desires and emotions, loves and hates, strengths and weaknesses, virtues and vices, aspirations and ideals, reaching for the stars and wallowing in the gutters. We will always need excuses.

We are, every single one of us, brave, loyal, kind, inventive, strong, compassionate.

We are, every single one of us, weak, lazy, perfidious, cowardly, dishonest, inconstant, uncaring.

We will let ourselves down. We will let others down. Worst of all, we will let those we love and those who love us down.

I claim no great insight for noting this: it's not something we don't, each and every one of us, in our hearts of hearts already know.

It is, just, the way it is. No wonder we need excuses.

Tonight, we recall again the last supper of Jesus and his disciples. Before, however, the guests sat down to eat, Jesus their leader, their teacher, their Messiah and their God, knelt down to wash his disciples feet. A bit odd for a dinner party, but a richly symbolic act of humility, service and love. The very same night, one of those whose feet he washed would betray him, one of them would deny him, all but one would run away and abandon him to his terrible fate.

Jesus knew they would do this.

Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me

Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.

The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone.

Jesus knew they would do this, he knew this full well, and still, he knelt and washed their feet. Still he loved them. Knowing when he needed his friends most, they would fall asleep. Knowing when he needed them most they would betray him, abandon him, deny him. Then come back with the excuses they never expected to have to offer.

The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak? I'll do it next week? Well I've been with you these past three years, can't I have just one day off?

Jesus knew they would do this. Still he loved them. Knowing they would be weak, lazy, perfidious, cowardly, dishonest, inconstant; knowing they would be human.

And still.

He washed their feet.

He walked the bitter way to Calvary

He died upon the Cross.

He laid down his life for his friends.

Running away. Betrayal. Denial. Mockery. Vilifying. Victimising. Cruelty. Torture. Killing.

These were the all too human responses of those around Jesus in these last hours: the religious authorities, the imperial authorities, the governor, the judiciary, the soldiers, the people, his followers, his friends.

Abandoned him. Betrayed him. Denied him. Mocked, vilified, victimised, tortured, and finally killed him.

All too human responses. Not much, we might say, has changed.

But.

Persistence. Loyalty. Humility. Kindness. Hope. Faith. Forbearance. Selflessness. Suffering for others. Forgiveness. Compassion. Love, above all, Love.

These too are human responses.

And Jesus showed us they *can* be the human response in the most extreme circumstances, they *can* be the human response in the face of sickening suffering, they *can* be the human response in the face of appalling provocation.

We are a turmoil of conflicting desires and emotions, aspirations and ideals; the good, the bad, the indifferent. And greatest of all that we can be is Love. All can love. And love conquers all.

Tonight, Jesus says:

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.

No more excuses.