

Easter – Maundy Thursday 2024

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; Psalm 115; Cor 11:23-26; John 13: 1-15

Quick, leave your old life behind! There is no time to dally or to hesitate. Destruction is upon us. The Lord is coming in judgement. Take your family and only those things that will not encumber you. Leave what you don't need. Prepare your meal quickly, eat it in haste and then depart. Do not look back. The Lord will strike the land that holds you captive. 'This day is to be a day of remembrance for you, and you must celebrate it as a feast in the Lord's honour.'¹

That was two thousand years ago.

Every year, observant Jews continue to obey God's command, as recorded in the Book of Exodus, to remember how He had set them free from slavery in Egypt. In our time the Jewish people still recite the Haggadah, a 2,000-year-old retelling of the story. They sing, they break bread, they drink cups of wine for the blessings: they feast. It is a deeply important time, giving them identify as a people. It is also joyful time, full of recollection of God's love for his people.

When Jesus is sat with his disciples celebrating this same Passover meal he too will be reciting an already ancient story. He too will be breaking bread and drinking the cup of wine of blessing. But amidst the noise and the merrymaking, something very

confusing occurs. Jesus goes silent. Conversations cease. Eyes fall on him. Something is happening. Slowly, and with great purpose, Jesus breaks the bread and says, "This is my body, which is for you: do this as a memorial of me.' What does this mean? The bread is shared and dipped in the dish of bitter herbs. After a few moments of uncertain silence, conversation resumes as normal. But at the end of the meal, there is another one of those strange pauses. Jesus looks distracted, thoughtful, and serious. All eyes are upon him once again. He speaks slowly and precisely: '*This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me.*'²

None of it makes sense to the disciples. Perhaps Jesus is telling another one of his parables. Maybe he is just too distracted and tired. The meaning of this meal will not fully make sense until after Easter. Until then, it serves to make the disciples uneasy.

Then Jesus rises to wash the dusty feet of his disciples, the role of a servant. Peter objects. Jesus insists. It is a sign that he is washing them clean from sin. When I come amongst you to wash your feet, it is to remind me, as Christ's priest, that I serve you. But, in the washing of the feet, it is Jesus who is truly present

¹ Exodus 12:11

² 1st Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 11:23-26

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and washing your feet. He is cleansing you from sin. Take what you have received and be careful how you walk from now on.

When you come to receive Holy Communion, He is still serving you. You will be receiving His Body and Blood from His hand. As we participate in the Passion of our Lord over these three days, the Lord is serving you, he is washing you clean.

Once Easter is upon us, we can look with hindsight upon this day - Maundy Thursday - and more fully understand it. The washing of the feet is an image of the cross, but you really do have to be cleansed, and you really do have to accept the cross into your own lives: the real cross that Jesus is stretched out upon. If this frightens you, this is okay. It frightened the disciples, too. But after they had been through Good Friday, Easter and Pentecost they realised that they could return to Maundy Thursday, to the washing of feet, and the Eucharist, with nothing to fear and with great Joy in their hearts.

Take this day with you through to Easter, then return to Maundy Thursday, understand, and give thanks.