

“This is the Night”
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Bruton Parish Church – Williamsburg, VA
Maundy Thursday – April, 2, 2026
Exodus 12:1-14, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, John 13:1-17, 31b-35

This is the night. This is the night that we tell the story of a very special meal. Part of this story is very ancient. It’s the part of the story that we share with our Jewish brothers and sisters. The story of the night of the Passover, the night that God spared the Hebrew people from the tenth plague, the plague that would take the life of all the firstborn in Egypt. It’s the night that God led the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt into a new life in covenant with God.

We heard just a tiny portion of that story in our first reading tonight, the part in which God gives Moses and Aaron instructions about their last meal in Egypt. Make sure the lamb is without blemish. Put some blood on the doorposts. Eat the lamb roasted with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Eat it with your staff in your hand and your shoes on your feet. In other words, be ready to move. God was going to pass over God’s people, spare them from the plague, part the Red Sea and free them from their bondage. “This shall be a day of remembrance for you.”

Over and over the story was told, passed down from generation to generation. Parents told it to children. Priests told it to the people. Elders told it to the young. Remember. The community told and retold the story. The story formed the community. God had heard their cries in Egypt and delivered them from their distress. God did mighty deeds to lead them into freedom.

Of course, leaving Egypt was just the beginning of a very long journey, through the waters of the Red Sea, deep into the wilderness, through forty years of wandering, and finally into the promised land. God led them with fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. God fed them with manna when they were hungry and brought forth water from the rock when they thirsted. Despite their newfound freedom, the people murmured against God. New life isn't always something we want. But God remained faithful to them no matter how they turned away, no matter how they worshiped idols, no matter how they complained against God.

And the people told the story. The story of God's faithfulness continued to be passed down.

This is the night.

This is the night that Jesus was betrayed, and on this night the story of the Passover was still being told. The Hebrew people *received* specific instructions on how to eat their last meal before leaving Egypt and beginning their new life. Jesus *gave* specific instructions on the night of his last meal before dying and beginning a new life. Jesus sat at table with his friends, took bread, gave thanks, broke the bread, and gave it to them. "This is my body. Do this in remembrance of me." In the midst of telling the ancient story of the Hebrew people, Jesus told a new story. "This is my blood. Do this in remembrance of me." No longer do you need to sacrifice a lamb without a blemish. No longer do you need to put blood on the doorposts. Now you have the Son of God, given for you. The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

This is the story you must remember. This is the story you must tell.

Over and over the story has been told, passed down from generation to generation. Parents told it to children. Priests told it to the people. Elders told it to the young. Remember. The community told and retold the story. The story formed the community.

This is *our* story, the story we retell each time we celebrate the Eucharist, each time we share our very special meal. God heard the cries of God's people, groaning in the slavery of sin. God delivered us from our distress. God became incarnate, came to live among us, shared our joys and sorrows, our hunger and thirst, our life and our death. Our God dwelled among us and then died, that we might have eternal life.

Tell the story. Pass down the story of God's faithfulness as you eat the bread and drink the wine. Remember that God has saved God's people, bringing us out of death and into life.

This is the night.

This is the night that we remember the ancient story of the Passover.

This is the night that we remember Jesus' last meal with his disciples.

This is the night that we also tell the story of how Jesus washed the feet of his friends *and* his betrayer, knowing what they would do and serving them anyway. Jesus didn't only *tell* us what to do – do this in remembrance of me –he also *showed* us what to do. "If I your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."

Only moments before Judas left to betray him, and hours before Peter denied him, Jesus served as a slave, removing his outer robe, washing their dirty, dusty feet, rough and cracked from hard use and stinking from whatever they had walked through, and then drying them with the towel wrapped around his waist. This humble act of love and service showed his disciples what new life in him meant.

New life isn't always something we want. Sometimes the bondage of slavery/self-will/sin seems more appealing than the demands of new life. It can feel easier to cling to the past than to allow Jesus to wash us clean. How often do we say with Peter, "You will never wash my feet"? Peter who argues because that is Peter's way. Peter who always thinks he's right. Peter who cannot bear to have his Lord and Teacher perform such a menial task for him.

But Jesus explains that Peter must receive his service.

Peter must allow Jesus to wash his feet.

How can we love others if we do not let Jesus love us?

In our brokenness and our sin, in our joy and in our grief, in our moments of kindness and compassion and in our moments of betrayal, denial, and abandonment?

It is Jesus' love for us that enables and equips us to share that love with others.

New life in Jesus means that we allow him into the dark and dirty spaces of our lives.

New life in Jesus means that we allow him to serve us and then we turn to serve our neighbors.

New life in Jesus means that we allow him to love us, and then we obey his commandment to love others.

“Just as I have loved you, so you also should love one another.”

It’s not a very complicated story. Pretty easy to remember.

This is the night. On Saturday evening we will hear another song sung, another story of death and rebirth, another proclamation of, “This is the night.” But on this night, we tell the stories of these special meals that we return to again and again. Over and over, we tell the story, passing it down from generation to generation. Parents tell it to children. Priests tell it to the people. Elders tell it to the young. Remember these stories that formed our community. Remember.

This is the night when we come to the table with Jesus and remember the incredible gift he gave us both through his death on the cross and by his showing us how to live. He meets us where we are, no matter how filthy our feet, no matter how great our sin. No amount of dirt or sin is too much for him. He meets us where we are and gently and lovingly washes us. He feeds us with his own body and blood. He asks us to do the same for each other. And then he leads us out of bondage to self into the freedom of new life in him.

This is our story of God’s faithfulness.

This is the story you must remember.

This is the story you must tell.