

Thursday, April 1, 2021

Maundy Thursday, Year B

Introduction

This evening our Lenten observance comes to an end, and we gather with Christians around the world to celebrate the Three Days of Jesus' death and resurrection. Tonight we remember Christ's last meal with his disciples, but the central focus is his commandment that we live out the promise embodied in this meal. As Jesus washed his disciples' feet, so we are called to give and receive love in humble service to one another. Formed into a new body in Christ through this holy meal, we are transformed by the mercy we have received and carry it into the world. Departing worship in solemn silence, we anticipate the coming days.

Confession and Forgiveness

Friends in Christ, in this Lenten season we have heard our Lord's call to struggle against sin, death, and the devil—all that keeps us from loving God and each other. This is the struggle to which we were called at baptism. [We have shared this discipline of Lent with new brothers and sisters in Christ who will be baptized at the Easter Vigil.]

Within the community of the church, God never wearies of forgiving sin and giving the peace of reconciliation. On this night let us confess our sin against God and our neighbor, and enter the celebration of the great Three Days reconciled with God and with one another.

Silence is kept for reflection and self-examination.

Most merciful God,

**we confess that we are captive to sin
and cannot free ourselves.**

**We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done and by what we have left undone.**

**We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.**

**For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us.**

**Forgive us, renew us, and lead us,
so that we may delight in your will
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your holy name. Amen.**

God, who is rich in mercy, loved us
even when we were dead in sin,
and made us alive together with Christ.

By grace you have been saved.

In the name of ✝ Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven.

Almighty God strengthen you with power

through the Holy Spirit,
that Christ may live in your hearts through faith.
Amen.

Prayer of the Day

Holy God, source of all love, on the night of his betrayal, Jesus gave us a new commandment, to love one another as he loves us. Write this commandment in our hearts, and give us the will to serve others as he was the servant of all, your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

First Reading: Exodus 12:1-4 [5-10] 11-14

Israel remembered its deliverance from slavery in Egypt by celebrating the festival of Passover. This festival featured the Passover lamb, whose blood was used as a sign to protect God's people from the threat of death. The early church described the Lord's supper using imagery from the Passover, especially in portraying Jesus as the lamb who delivers God's people from sin and death.

¹The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ²This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. ³Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. ⁴If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. ⁵Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. ⁷They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ⁹Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. ¹⁰You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn.] ¹¹This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the LORD. ¹²For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. ¹³The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

¹⁴This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

Psalm: Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19

I will lift the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. (Ps. 116:13)

¹I love the LORD, who has | heard my voice,
and listened to my | supplication,

²**for the LORD has given | ear to me
whenev- | er I called.**

¹²How shall I re- | pay the LORD
for all the good things God has | done for me?

¹³**I will lift the cup | of salvation
and call on the name | of the LORD. R**

¹⁴I will fulfill my vows | to the LORD
in the presence of | all God's people.

¹⁵**Precious in your | sight, O LORD,
is the death | of your servants.**

¹⁶O LORD, truly I | am your servant;
I am your servant, the child of your handmaid; you have freed me | from my bonds.

¹⁷**I will offer you the sacrifice | of thanksgiving
and call upon the name | of the LORD.**

¹⁸I will fulfill my vows | to the LORD
in the presence of | all God's people,

¹⁹**in the courts of | the LORD's house,
in the midst of you, | O Jerusalem. R**

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

In the bread and cup of the Lord's supper, we experience intimate fellowship with Christ and with one another because it involves his body given for us and the new covenant in his blood. Faithful participation in this meal is a living proclamation of Christ's death until he comes in the future.

²³For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Gospel: John 13:1-17, 31b-35

The story of the last supper in John's gospel recalls a remarkable event not mentioned elsewhere: Jesus performs the duty of a slave, washing the feet of his disciples and urging them to do the same for one another.

¹Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon

Iscairiot to betray him. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹²After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

^{31b}"Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³²If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Sermon

Grace and Peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

As we begin our worship in this week we call Holy, we begin with three concepts: the washing of feet, the sharing of bread and wine, and the command to love one another as Christ loved us

After taking off his outer garment, kneeling down and washing his disciples' feet, Jesus said, "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you." It seems very apparent then to follow Christ is to take the humble role of servant. It is to serve others with humility. "Wash one another's feet," Jesus commanded his followers.

Some scholars define the 13th chapter of John's gospel as the "book of glory." In this chapter we find Jesus saying, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified in him. If God

has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.” For Jesus, glorification comes through humility, which is in stark contrast to Roman theology which taught that one could ascend from slavery to divinity in a series of predetermined steps. This was glorification. For Jesus, however, glorification is self-emptying movement of downward mobility from divinity to slavery.

Nowhere is this better expressed than by Paul in his letter to the church at Philippi where he says that though, Jesus was in the form of God, he did not exploit it, but emptied himself, taking on the form of a servant. This is what it means to follow Jesus, what it means to walk the way of the cross.

Jesus invites his followers to remember him by breaking bread and drinking wine. “Do this in remembrance of me,” Jesus says. Paul recounts these words, though he was not at the last supper and readily admits he has not spent much time with the first disciples, those who sat at the feet of Jesus. Instead, Paul, who is mystic, has received this by a personal revelation from Jesus. As often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim Christ, the way of Jesus, and his death in the cross.

So we find that eating together was a defining mark of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners as a sign of the kingdom of God’s breaking in. And we remember that this got him in trouble with the purity folks. Holy Communion, the Eucharist, is one way in which we practice this today. What other ways can we live out this way of being in the world?

We could even ask – who do we invite to our houses for dinner? All of this then invites us to think about how we might use eating and drinking together as a way to heal the divisions in the world. And doing that is not merely a suggestion. It is a command from Jesus himself: “Do this in remembrance of me.”

Tonight we also remember these words of Jesus: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” This is a very strong and important statement. The word “love” appears seven times in John 13 and 39 times in John’s gospel – more than the other three gospels combined, indicating the importance for John of this theme.

Jesus lays out before us a defining mark of the church: This is how people can tell you are my followers, by your love for one another. Not by your form of worship, your buildings, or even your creeds. Paul says if he has faith to move mountains but does not love, he is nothing. What if love truly is the defining mark of the church? What could possibly stop a church like that?

And truly this is not merely a suggestion. You may remember that the word “Maundy” comes from the Latin word “mandate,” which means “command.” On this night, the night before his crucifixion, we remember Jesus’ command to wash feet like a servant, to eat bread and drink wine together in Jesus’ name, and to love one another.

When we stop and think about it, we realize that loving one another is not really a new commandment. We can find that in the Old Testament. The new part is “as I have loved you.”

We have come to realize and appreciate, I believe, that during the season of Lent we are invited more and more to contemplate: our life, our relationship with others and the world and our relationship with God. We often use scripture to help us do just that.

Holy Week is a great time to take time and contemplate the events of this week and how they impact each of us and the church today. And that exercise is not to be taken lightly. We could surely spend a great deal of time doing just that.

To assist us in that effort, I believe there are thoughts that arise from our texts, tonight, Maundy Thursday. An important one is this: Just how did Jesus love us? The answer for us to contemplate is this: by eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners, by healing the sick and preaching the good news of the kingdom of God, by giving himself to us in the Eucharist, Holy Communion, and by giving his life on the cross.

Then, of course, comes the time for us to look at ourselves and to see how we are emulating Christ in how we live daily as his followers. How do we love one another as Christ loved us?

Thanks be to God.

Amen

Prayers of Intercession

The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.

United by the servant love of God in Christ, we pray this holy night for the needs of the world.

A brief silence.

You call your people to hand on what we receive from you. Form all the baptized into teachers of faith. From one generation to the next, give your church hunger for your promises in the sacraments and joy in receiving and sharing your word. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Your creation provides all that we need. Cleanse and protect the water you have given for washing and drinking, water on which all life depends. Sustain crops and herds that provide food; teach us how to live so that there is enough for all. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

You redeemed your people from slavery. Preserve people throughout the world who flee violence and oppression (*especially*). Establish just leadership in place of tyranny and peace in place of war. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Jesus loved his followers to the end. Grant assurance of that love to all who need it: those living with guilt, those struggling to forgive, those who are lonely or overlooked. Heal the sick and embrace the dying. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Jesus washed the feet of the one who betrayed him. Inspire this congregation's ministries of service (*especially*), that we love as Jesus loved us. Give us renewed courage to serve. Bless the ministry of deacons throughout the church. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Your glory shone in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We thank you for generations of the faithful who have proclaimed our Lord's death. Unite us with them in hope until he comes again. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Hear these and all our prayers, O God, in the name of the one who loves us to the end, Jesus Christ our Redeemer.

Amen.