

“Maundy Thursday”
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Opening Prayer

Good Evening, hopefully your Holy Week has gotten off to a great start. Maundy Thursday is the celebration of the Last Supper that Jesus had before His crucifixion. It marks the institution of the sacrament of Communion (“do this in remembrance of Me”), it shows Jesus’s humility and service through the symbolic act of footwashing, and it is the setting of many of Jesus’s final teachings. Throughout the year in our churches we remember this day and the one that follows it in part when we partake in Communion, but tonight and tomorrow we really focus in on the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf. Maundy Thursday sets the stage for the pain of Good Friday, and ultimately for the joy of Easter Sunday.

John 13:1-2 gives us the background of the Lord’s Supper. “Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him...” The Last Supper takes place during the time of the year known as Passover for the Jews. During Passover they would bake bread that had no yeast in it, stay in their homes quietly, and remember the deliverance that the Lord gave them as they exited Egypt. Maundy Thursday for us takes place over that same time period. The reason it is called “Passover” is because the Lord passed over the Israelites who were slaves in Egypt, and He struck down the firstborn of the Egyptians. The Israelites were instructed to sacrifice a lamb the day of the Passover, place its blood upon the wooden doorframes of their homes, and to eat the flesh of the lamb along with their unleavened bread. In the Gospel of John, we should understand that Jesus is the world’s Passover lamb. He came not to save us from a human captor though, but rather to rescue us from sin and eternal death. His blood, like the blood of the lamb that is sacrificed, will be placed upon the door posts... a wooden cross. The lamb’s flesh that is eaten during Passover is shown for us in Jesus’s words to “take and eat, this is my body broken for you...”

While the supper is beginning, we can see that Judas is already preparing to betray Jesus, which he will do so with a kiss in the garden that the disciples with Jesus go to after supper to pray. This is a somber and very serious time in the lives of these men. This is an important time of the year for them, just as it is for us. Just as we observe Holy Week in a serious manner, so too did they regard Passover. During this time of seriousness, Jesus does something very profound to show His humility and service to the world. He girds Himself with a towel.

In verse 3-5 we read “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, got up from supper, and laid

aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded." This is not an action befitting of the King of kings. This is not an action befitting of a teacher, or leader, or even of a man condemned to die in a few short hours. At least not in the eyes of men. Rather this is something a servant would do. Feet in the Middle East, like in most other places, are dirty. In Jesus's day most wore sandals, and in the dust and grime of the city a person's feet would be filthy. Often rich people would employ someone to wash the feet of their guests, a servant or slave, but no person of stature would do such a disgusting act for others. Yet here Jesus does it for His disciples. Only the disciple Peter it seems questioned this, and Jesus's response is that He has made them clean, but not all of them. (He is referencing Judas there.) He says in verses 13-17 "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you should do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them." Beloved, those words should hold merit for us this evening.

Jesus, in the last twenty-four hours of His life, makes it a point to share with His followers that they are to serve one another. Between chapters 13 and 18 in John's Gospel Jesus will make mention of this several more times. It is something that we should remember even as we sit in quarantine, that as Jesus's followers we are called to serve others just as He served us. It has nothing to do with deserving it, it has nothing to do with being best friends (Jesus washes Judas's feet too), and it has nothing to do with how much others like us. We are called to show that Christ lives within us by serving others well. (This doesn't mean that you put yourself in a harmful situation, or treat yourself poorly, but it does mean that we are called to help others. Period.) In the last few hours of His life He makes sure to make this known. In John's Gospel, after the Last Supper is completed Jesus will go on to teach the disciples for five more chapters before they go to the Garden of Gethsemane. To help us understand the other main point of the Last Supper, the institution of Communion, we jump over to the Gospel of Mark.

Mark 14:22-31 sees the same time and place as our reading in John, but it is here that we get the command to take the elements of bread and wine/juice in remembrance of what Jesus is going to do. Verses 22-25 read "While they were eating, He took some bread, and after a blessing He broke it, and gave it to them, and said, 'Take it; this is My body.' And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, 'This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.'" Beloved, we see here the command to do this in remembrance of Him. The sacrifice which He makes upon the cross, the pain which He endures, the blood that is shed... all on our behalf. From here, following the supper, Jesus will lead the disciples out to the Mount of Olives. He will tell them the truth there, that "You will all fall away." (Mark 14:27) In a few

short hours, despite the disciples' protests, they will leave Jesus alone to His fate. Peter will deny Christ three times, no one will stick up for Jesus, and it seems that the bad guys will win as they will crucify Jesus tomorrow during the day. All will seem lost... until Sunday.

On this Maundy Thursday as we sit quietly with only a few family members (or perhaps even only ourselves) around, we can feel the heaviness of the moment. As we take the elements together here in a moment, let us remember the pain that our Savior bore for our sins, and thank Him for that sacrifice. God Bless you this evening, let us take a moment of prayer before we take the elements.

Closing Prayer