

## Maundy Thursday 09/04/2020

### Opening

Our Lord Jesus Christ says: 'If you love me, keep my commandments.'  
'Unless I wash you, you have no part in me.' Let us confess to almighty God our sins against his love, and ask him to cleanse us.

*[Pause for reflection]*

Lord, have mercy upon us.

Christ, have mercy upon us.

Lord, have mercy upon us.

May the Father forgive *us* by the death of his Son  
and strengthen *us* to live in the power of the Spirit all *our* days. **Amen.**

### Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you have taught us that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters we do also for you: give us the will to be the servant of others as you were the servant of all, and gave up your life and died for us, but are alive and reign, now and for ever. **Amen.**

### Reading: Matthew 26: 17-30

### Reflection

'Eagerly I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer,' said Jesus (Luke 22: 15). Eagerness and suffering are equally present at the Last Supper. It's a joyful get-together that they'd all be eager for at the end of three years on the road together; and it's a poignant separation, made more painful by misunderstandings and hints of betrayal and abandonment.

The Gospels record it happened at Passover, what today is called a *seder* meal. The tension of joy and suffering runs through this annual commemoration. The *seder* is a meal that tells the story of the liberation of the people of Israel from their captivity in Egypt. It is a celebration, but it is also shot through with recollections of suffering and the cost of redemption. Through the words and the symbolic food, participants are reminded of the awfulness of slavery and the privations of the Exodus journey, and also of what the Egyptians had to suffer – the plagues inflicted on them and the sea that engulfed them. There's a strange custom within the *seder*, when you flick wine from your glass onto a napkin whilst chanting the ten plagues of Egypt. However, a Jewish speaker explained it's not triumphalist like it sounds, quite the reverse: It reminds us, she said, that 'our cup of wine cannot be full while others suffer, even our enemies'. The cost of redemption is very present in the partaking of the meal.

At his Last Supper, Jesus redefined the meal around himself, and also redefined redemption as in himself. Through bread and wine, customary in the *seder*, he articulated the suffering he would undergo and the redemption it would bring. The Israelites of old had been redeemed from the Egyptian captivity. Now all humanity can be redeemed from the captivity of sin and death – these things no longer need to define our lives – through his body broken and blood shed on the cross. No longer is there a one-way street to destruction: he has opened a new way of life and peace. This is redemption – to be one with him, by faith part of his body. We make physical expression of this through doing as he said at that last supper: eating bread that's broken and drinking wine that's poured out, in faithful remembrance of him.

For very many of us, whose practice is to receive Holy Communion each week, the current restrictions are a severe blow. We miss not only the fellowship of the church but the comfort, encouragement, inner peace and outward challenge that bread and wine express more powerfully than words. But keep faith: it is by faith we are incorporated into Christ's body. Nothing can separate us from him.

The Church of England has always had provision for what's known as 'spiritual communion', designed for times of 'pestilence' as well as individual illness. The Book of Common Prayer instructs us that, even if we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves, if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ:' Spiritual Communion. Penitence, thanksgiving and intercession are probably part of our personal prayers every day anyway, but to pray in this way intentionally at times when we would normally have received Communion is somehow special. We belong to Christ's mystical body which is the faithful company of all his people.

The first Maundy Thursday did not end with the Last Supper. Jesus led his friends to the Garden of Gethsemane, and called them to watch and pray – something they failed to manage. His friend Judas led the arrest party and betrayed him with a kiss. His other friends fled. Then he was interrogated by the Sanhedrin, whilst outside Peter three times before dawn denied he ever was Jesus' friend. Maundy Thursday is a day that requires all our moral courage if we are to keep true and faithful to Christ; to stay strong to our faith in times of trial; to see whatever we may suffer in the light of what our Lord suffered; and to keep hopeful of the joy that is set before us through his sacrifice and glorious resurrection.

## Intercessions

In the power of the Spirit let us pray to the Father through Christ the saviour of the world.

Father, on this, the night he was betrayed, your Son Jesus Christ washed his disciples' feet. We commit ourselves to follow his example of love and service. Lord, hear us, **and humble us.**

On this night, he prayed for his disciples to be one. We pray for the unity of your Church. Lord, hear us, **and unite us.**

On this night, he prayed for those who were to believe through his disciples' message. We pray for the mission of your Church. Lord, hear us, **and renew our zeal.**

On this night, he commanded his disciples to love, but suffered rejection himself. We pray for the rejected and unloved. Lord, hear us, **and fill us with your love.**

On this night, he accepted the cup of death and looked forward to the new wine of the kingdom. We remember those who have died in the peace of Christ. Lord, hear us, **and welcome all your children into paradise. Amen.**

## The Lord's Prayer

### Closing

Christ was obedient unto death.  
**May we go in his peace.**