

Exodus 12: 1-4, 11-14

12 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: 2 This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. 3 Tell 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. 4 If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbour in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. 11 This 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. 12 For 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 judgements: I am the Lord. 13 The 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. 14 This 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.

1 Corinthians 11: 23-26

23 For 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, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' 25 In 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.' 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

John 13: 1-17, 31b-35

13 Now 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. 2 The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, 4 got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 5 Then 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. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' 7 Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' 8 Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' 9 Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' 10 Jesus 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.' 11 For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'

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

31 When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32 If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33 Little 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." 34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

Collect

God our Father,
you have invited us to share in the supper
which your Son gave to his Church
to proclaim his death until he comes:
may he nourish by his presence,
and unite us in his love;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God now and for ever.

Maundy Thursday Sermon

Rev Philip Cox

The next four days are the climax of the Christian year, so it's particularly poignant that we cannot celebrate them physically together. Nevertheless every cloud has a silver lining and at least Rev'd Jack will be spared the foot washing for which he had volunteered by agreeing to be deacon at our benefice service.

It seems to me there are two main elements to the Maundy Thursday commemoration, one being a matter of principle, the other a matter of practice.

To take the second first, let's consider foot washing. At present we are rightly focused on hygiene – hand washing, sanitisers, masks and protective gowns. In biblical times foot washing was not just the equivalent of having a shower before going to a party; it was a gesture of hospitality.

With guests walking the fields and dusty streets in open sandals or bare feet, foot washing was a normal preliminary before meals. The foot washing of other people was a menial task done by inferiors for superiors. It was performed for guests by slaves (usually women), by children for parents, by wives for husbands and sometimes by students for their teacher. It was unheard of for a teacher, a rabbi to wash his pupils' feet but that is what the rabbi, Jesus, does for his pupils, the disciples. This is, unusually, an 'acted parable', or a visual aid as Jesus illustrates that his disciples are to be servants, not lords.

So to move from the parable, the example, the practice to the principle, we can focus on what 'Maundy' means. It comes from the Latin word *mandatum*, meaning command and links to the commandments Jesus gives to his disciples, including us, to love God and our neighbour as ourselves. Although based on the Old Testament commandments in Leviticus, Jesus gives it added impetus by emphasising it immediately before his own arrest, trial and crucifixion as he gives up his life for others. For the Son of God to do this is an act of supreme humility of which his foot washing is a rather pale example, albeit striking, to the disciples as Peter's reaction illustrates.

So Maundy Thursday is in many ways a climax – it represents the end of Jesus’ teaching, preaching and healing as he prepares to go to the Garden of Gethsemane and Calvary. Sadly, this year, we shall miss the emotional climax to our service when the altar is stripped in preparation for our commemoration of the events of Good Friday. However, perhaps above all in our current circumstances we may try to be like Christ as he asserts, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.”

Thanks be to God that we have so many examples of selfless love to encourage and sustain us as we try to maintain our Christian values without the physical presence of our fellow believers.

Hymn

refrain

A new commandment I give unto you,
That you love one another as I have loved you,
That you love one another as I have loved you.

1 By this shall all know that you are my disciples,
if you have love one for another.

By this shall all know that you are my disciples,
if you have love one for another.

Refrain

2 You are my friends if you do what I command you.
Without my help you can do nothing.
You are my friends if you do what I command you.
Without my help you can do nothing.

Refrain:

3 I am the true vine, my Father is the gard’ner.
Abide in me: I will be with you.
I am the true vine, my Father is the gard’ner.
Abide in me: I will be with you.

Refrain

4 True Love is patient, not arrogant or boastful.
Love bears all things, love is eternal.
True Love is patient, not arrogant or boastful.
Love bears all things, love is eternal.

Refrain: