

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.

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 116:1-2, 12-19

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

²**for the LORD has given | ear to me
whenever | 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.**

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.**

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 Reading: 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 Iscariot 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."

Prayers of Intercession

United by the servant love of God in Christ, we pray this holy night for the needs of the world, saying “hear us, O God,” and responding, “your mercy is great.”

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.**

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.

A reflection for Maundy Thursday...

Receiving and Handing On

Paul writes to the Corinthians, “For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you.” He refers to the institution of the Lord’s supper, but the pattern of receiving and handing on applies to so much more in Christian faith and practice: We hand on the faith, hope, love, and understanding we have received. Conversely, we cannot give what has not first been given to us.

Jesus’ first disciples learn this in the last supper according to John. As John 13 begins, Jesus’ “hour” has arrived. At the meal Jesus washes his disciples’ feet and commands them to pass on the loving service to others: “You also should do as I have done to you.” Jesus too hands on to his disciples what he has first received from God: “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you” (John 15:9). Jesus does not just command servant love, nor does he merely exemplify it. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus *enables* his followers to love. Jesus’ example of servant love in washing his disciples’ feet literally grounds them for all that is to come and all that disciples are called to do.

This potent image helps us interpret Jesus’ giving of himself in death, and it undergirds the community of loving service formed in Christ. As Peter discovers, Jesus’ disciples must first *receive* from Jesus in order to have a “share” with him (John 13:8). Then disciples are called to follow him in giving themselves away—not just for the sake of serving, but also for the sake of being drawn into relationship with Jesus and with his Father. Through that relationship we are drawn into the community of disciples, where we receive and hand on Christ’s meal and the gift of servant love.

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