

Maundy Thursday, Year A
March 20, 2008

RCL
Exodus 12:1-14a
Psalm 116:1, 10-17
1 Corinthians 11:23-26
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

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It is the last night of his life, and he knows it. Judas has already agreed to betray him. The die is cast. Jesus knows this is his last supper with the disciples who have given up so much to follow him. In these hours before his suffering he eats the Passover meal with them and he transforms that familiar meal into something entirely new.

What has been for them, as practicing Jews, the feast celebrating the night God delivered his people out of Egypt, the feast of a lamb which they ate for strength and whose blood they used to mark their doorways for protection; this feast Jesus changes into a celebration of God's salvation for all believers in all times, everywhere.

This time Jesus is the lamb to be sacrificed. This time the blood is his, the very wine which they drink together at that meal. And the bread, broken, is his body, broken for their salvation, and for the salvation of the whole world.

The rescue this time is not from Egypt but from sin. The freedom is not from being imprisoned by Pharaoh, but from being imprisoned by greed and willfulness and self-appreciation.

The disciples do as he asks, though they don't understand. "Do this," he says. "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, do this in remembrance of me."

But to remember him by receiving the sacrament of his Body and Blood is only a part of his charge to them – and to us. There's more. Now he simply gets up from the table, and without a word ties a towel around his waist. Then he kneels before them to wash their feet.

This is a complete shock to them. They resist. It seems so inappropriate. He's their Master. Why would he wash them?! "You will never wash my feet" Peter responds. But Jesus insists. "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." What does this mean?

If you have your feet washed tonight you will have some idea of what this means. Everyone's welcome to come up and see what it feels like. I would call it a feeling of vulnerability. And the lesson in it is that we must let ourselves be vulnerable to Jesus. He insisted that his disciples allow him to wash their feet.

And when he finished and sat down again, he said to them, "I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Love one another as I have loved you."

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welcome.

This is the new commandment, in Latin the *novum mandatum*, which gives us the English term “Maundy” and names this night. The new commandment - Serve one another and do it out of love.

This is how Jesus would have his followers live. Come to the table and humbly receive his Body and Blood, for life, for strength, for forgiveness, for courage, for peace, for joy, and then get up, go out of the church and into the world and kneel down before the poor, the sick, the friendless, the troubled, the lonely, and even those who would betray us, and wash their feet. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria