

Maundy Thursday Service

Introduction

Welcome to our Maundy Thursday Worship at Home. On this Thursday of Holy Week, we are moving toward the dramatic events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday. This evening is the time when we remember the meal that Jesus shared with his closest friends on the night before he died. We recall the teaching that he gave to his disciples and the suffering he prepared for on the cross. As we listen to Jesus' words we look forward to the victory he would win on Easter Sunday. So with all these things in mind, let's pray as we begin.

Opening Prayer

God our Father,
your Son Jesus Christ was obedient to the end
and drank the cup prepared for him:
may we who share his table
watch with him through the night of suffering
and be faithful. **Amen.**

Reading

"I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father."

John 16:28

Reflection

On this night before his crucifixion, Jesus takes time to teach and encourage his disciples. Around the passover meal table, Jesus sums up his life and ministry. "I came from the Father and entered the world," he says. "Now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father." Jesus looks through the cross and resurrection to his ascension and the giving of the Holy Spirit. He knows the suffering he must go through but looks past it to the victory of the kingdom.

Yet that victory and that kingdom will be won through the cross. Around the dinner table, Jesus helps his disciples understand what he must do. He takes bread and breaks it. They would have seen him do that a thousand times around a myriad of tables. But today Jesus tells them: This is my body, given for you. This is what must happen. Just as this bread is broken, so I will be broken for the sins of the world.

Then he takes up the cup of wine. The passover meal would have included a number of different cups, with different meanings. The cup that Jesus picked was known as the cup of salvation. That's what Jesus came to do: to win salvation for us. And he tells them: this is by blood, poured out for your forgiveness. Salvation is certain because of Jesus' sacrifice.

Jesus' words are powerful and extraordinary. They would have astounded those disciples around the dinner table. They should astound us too. Jesus is God himself, come from the Father and returning to the Father. And he does so by giving himself on the cross. For you and me.

So with that in mind, let's confess our need for the salvation that Jesus won and the forgiveness that he freely offers. We are going to pray a prayer of confession and I invite you to join in the response: When I say "Lord, forgive us" please respond "Christ have mercy."

Confession

God shows his love for us in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
Let us then show our love for him by confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

Lord Jesus Christ, we confess we have failed you as did your first disciples.
We ask for your mercy and your help.

When we take our ease
rather than watch with you:
Lord, forgive us.

Christ have mercy.

When we bestow a kiss of peace
yet nurse enmity in our hearts:
Lord, forgive us.

Christ have mercy.

When we strike at those who hurt us
rather than stretch out our hands to bless:
Lord, forgive us.

Christ have mercy.

When we deny that we know you
for fear of the world and its scorn:
Lord, forgive us.

Christ have mercy.

Song: Here is love

(CCLI Song # 3287884)

Here is love vast as the ocean
Loving-kindness as the flood
When the Prince of Life our Ransom
Shed for us His precious blood
Who His love will not remember
Who can cease to sing His praise
He can never be forgotten
Throughout Heav'n's eternal days

On the mount of crucifixion
Fountains opened deep and wide
Through the floodgates of God's mercy
Flowed a vast and gracious tide
Grace and love like mighty rivers
Poured incessant from above
Heav'n's peace and perfect justice
Kissed a guilty world in love

*No love is higher, no love is wider
No love is deeper, no love is truer
No love is higher, no love is wider
No love is like Your love, O Lord*

Reading

Then Jesus' disciples said, "Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God."

"You believe at last!" Jesus answered. "But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me."

John 16:29-32

Reflection

As we come to the end of Jesus' dinner conversation with his disciples, his followers are excited. Jesus' words are clearer to them than ever before and their faith is stronger. But Jesus knows what is about to come. In just a few hours, in the garden of Gethsemane, he will be arrested. Those disciples who seem so excited now, will run away, leaving Jesus all alone.

I always find this episode very challenging. Would I have run away as those disciples did? Would I flee leaving Jesus alone? I'd like to think I wouldn't, but could I really claim to have more faith than Peter, James and John?

Along with the challenge, Jesus' words and actions come with comfort for us. First of all, they tell us that *Jesus knows what it means to be alone*. If you picture Jesus, perhaps like me you picture him surrounded by crowds. Or maybe walking with his twelve disciples through Galilee. Or eating at the home of Lazarus his friend. I don't often picture Jesus alone. But he knew what it meant to be alone and isolated. Sometimes he sought this out for times of prayer. But on this night he knew what it meant to be forced to be alone. To be isolated out of force. To be cut off from others he normally spent his days with.

On a trip to Israel, I had the privilege of visiting the site of Caiphas' house, where Jesus would have been held before his trial on Good Friday. There our group descended into a dark pit where they would have held prisoners. Almost certainly that is where Jesus would have spent Thursday night. It was deeply moving to consider Jesus' loneliness and isolation on the night before the cross.

Jesus knows what it means to be alone. As we feel alone and isolated, perhaps cut off in many ways from those we know and love, we have a saviour who has been there too.

Yet, *Jesus was never alone*. Although he knew loneliness and isolation, at the same time Jesus was never left alone. Did you notice those wonderful words from Jesus' lips? "Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me." Jesus knew that his Father would never leave him or abandon him. Even in the darkest pit and coldest dungeon, Jesus and his Father were one. The work of evil men could never separate the Son from the Father. The abandonment of the disciples could never make his heavenly Father abandon Jesus. He was never alone.

And here's the truth for us this Maundy Thursday. *We are never truly alone either*. Because of what Jesus would achieve in his death and resurrection, what Jesus affirms is true for us. What he says, we can say too. "Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me." We have the presence of both the Father and the Son given to us through the Holy Spirit who lives in us. We are never alone, even in the remotest situation, and even in the darkest hour. We are never alone because God is with us. We are never alone because the Father will never abandon his children, because the Son has bought us with a price, because the Spirit lives in us. As we remember the darkness of Jesus' loneliness this evening, let's also rejoice in the gift that he gives. Through his loneliness we need never be alone.

Prayers

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 reminded his disciples
that if the world hated them it hated him first.
We pray for those who are persecuted for their faith.
Lord, hear us
and give us your peace.

On this night, he accepted the cup of death
and looked forward to the new wine of the kingdom.
We long for the full coming of that kingdom.
Lord, hear us
and let your kingdom come.

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

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

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

John 16:33

Reflection

These are the final words of Jesus’ teaching to his disciples on that Thursday evening as recorded in John’s gospel. Jesus sums up his teaching with the message that he wants his followers to take away. He has told them so much, some of which they have grasped; other things they will only come to realise later. But Jesus wants them to understand this: he gives us *peace*. There is plenty of unrest, distress and difficulty around; this world has plenty of trouble.

Jesus is completely realistic about that. He is not removing his disciples from the world and its trouble. Instead he is giving us his peace in the midst of it. We stand apart from the world which doesn't know Jesus, because we have peace. We know the one who has overcome the world.

After this, the disciples will follow Jesus out to the garden of Gethsemane. From there events will start in motion that will lead to the cross of Good Friday. I wonder if Jesus' words rang strangely in their ears during the coming day. Jesus says he has overcome the world, yet he seems to be overcome by evil men. Jesus says he has the victory but the cross seemed at the time like defeat. Jesus overcomes but he has to undergo suffering.

Maundy Thursday into Good Friday reminds us that God's plans, God's peace and God's power does not always look like victory. Sometimes it looks like pain and defeat and trouble. Sometimes it doesn't always feel as if Jesus has overcome the world. But we are to take heart. Jesus has overcome, even through suffering. And we can know, and need to know, his peace during every hour of every day. May that peace come on us and overwhelm us this evening as we remember how Jesus overcame this world.

Song: When I survey the wondrous cross

(Throneroom Family)

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the death of Christ my God
All the vain things that charm me most
I sacrifice them to His blood

See from His head, His hands, His feet
Sorrow and love flow mingled down
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

*Oh what a sacrifice you made
Through this your love has been displayed
The Saviour's arms stretched out upon the cross
His lavish love has paid the cost*

Were the whole realm of nature mine
That were an offering far too small
Love so amazing, so divine
Demands my soul, my life, my all
Demands my soul, my life, my all

Closing Prayer

Eternal God,
in the cross of Jesus
we see the cost of our sin
and the depth of your love:
in humble hope and fear
may we place at his feet
all that we have and all that we are,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**