

## Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12:1-14

John 13:1-17,31b-35

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

“O Lord we are your servants;  
the children of your serving girl.  
You have loosed our bonds.” AMEN!

(Sing) “And in the end, the love you take  
is equal to the love you make.”

Most of you know that song.

Someone wrote that it was  
“the perfect capper, finishing with a song  
called “The End.”

An ideal curtain call from a band that  
began as a bunch of punk kids  
from nowheresville (Liverpool).”

That was of course, The Beatles. (Pause)

Tonight we have the first Passover meal in Exodus,  
Paul’s letter to the Corinthians about  
the Lord’s Supper, and the Gospel of John  
telling us the way Jesus washed  
his disciple’s feet and  
then gave them (and us)  
the new commandment.

“And in the end.”

That we love one another the way  
Jesus loves us.

We will begin with gathering around meals  
since that's the general theme of the readings.

Communal meals, in antiquity, were  
customary ways to exercise power.

These private banquets were famous affairs,  
they were events that allowed people  
with extravagant wealth to flaunt it by  
serving exotic foods, having  
luxurious decorations, impressive  
entertainment and  
sometimes, outlandish  
performances.

People with power used these kinds of events  
to keep friends close and enemies closer.

Commentator Jason Ripley tells of one such emperor,  
Domitian, who would throw macabre  
dinner parties called "Black Banquets."

"Cloaking the room, and the slaves in black,  
[they'd] serve black-dyed food that  
was commonly served at funerals.

Domitian would arrange the guests to be seated

next to personalized tombstones,  
while they nervously anticipated if  
they'd be summoned to execution,  
before the next course.

Though it was ultimately an emperor's prank,  
the message of absolute power was crystal clear  
and could not have been more serious." (Pause)

How different then is Jesus' banquet from  
that kind of "power meal."

Jesus' "Supper" was also different from a Passover Meal.

The Passover Meal had to do with  
remembering the departure from Egypt  
in the midst of God about  
to perform a devastating miracle of  
first reborn deaths.

The Israelites were being miraculously spared  
by marking posts with a lamb's blood.

And, along with that miracle, the Israelites were directed  
to eat quickly with a readiness to depart,  
but Jesus' last supper was intimate and quiet.

Jesus' group reclined on pillows and couches.

The first century audience would understand  
the significance of Jesus "rising up" to wash

their feet while the disciples reclined.

This meal was different, but  
it was a “power meal,” too.

God had given all things into the hands of Jesus,  
but the emphasis of that power,  
was not fear or intimidation.

The emphasis at this meal is love:  
Jesus’ love for his own.

With words and with actions Jesus performed,  
with authority, a new commandment and  
a counter-cultural performance of power.

How notable it is that the hands that hold  
“all things” are the same ones  
used to wash the feet of  
the lower status disciples.

Jesus washed even the heel that  
was lifted against Him. (Pause)

“One could scarcely imagine Domitian washing  
the feet of his dinner guests.”

We witness, once again, God’s way  
as a sharp contrast  
to the imperial way. (Pause)

This way, the Jesus way, makes room  
for God to act.

It prepares for us a readiness to receive God's grace,  
and it might even bring about a response from us  
to reflect God's relentless and  
generous love toward those  
who are betrayers and deniers. (Pause)

I can relate with Peter when he said,  
"Lord, you will never wash my feet!"

Most of us can.

It's too intimate, and  
makes ourselves too vulnerable.

We can handle being called prudes,  
so we take comfort in Peter's response.

But then things happen to us, and  
if we are awake enough to notice them,  
we begin to discover that intimacy  
and vulnerability are the things  
that draw us nearer to the divine.

(Pause)

As Pastor Mark Hollingsworth Jr. wrote  
about the way God offered him a process of seeing  
more fully into the intimacy and  
vulnerability that God had

brought unto him in spiritual conversion  
which came from an  
extraordinary young friend.

“When I met Carter Brown,” he wrote,  
“he was a fifteen year old high school  
freshman fighting a particularly vicious form  
of cancer.

The eldest of three boys,  
Carter was well over 6 ft tall, and loved all  
the things young adolescent boys love -  
basketball, friends, music, boogie boarding.

I met him shortly after his cancer had recurred  
and was attacking his bones.

Over the course of our visits we talked for hours  
about things in life that intrigued and delighted us.

He asked me countless questions  
about being a pastor, or what my  
favorite music or movies were.

What it's like being a parent and other personal questions.

It never felt like he was prying,  
but simply making space for me in his life,  
and thereby a space for me in my own life,  
where I could just be who I am.

Carter was in and out of the hospital and  
the cancer clinic regularly because the disease  
in his bones was affecting his blood production  
and was extremely painful.

But thankfully, he was able to be at home a lot,  
and during the day he lived on the couch  
in the living room spending time with family  
and friends.

A couple days before Carter died in early March,  
my six year old son and I were visiting him.

His parents and brothers were there too.

Friends came in and out.

Carter was laying on the couch under an old quilt.

Though he was on considerable pain medication,  
the ache in his bones, especially his legs and  
his hips made him move around a lot,  
as he tried and tried to get comfortable.

All the movement made the cuffs of his pajama pants  
ride up along his long, thin legs which made  
him all the more uncomfortable and a little chilly.  
So he asked me if I would help him.

Lifting up the quilt, he asked me to pull  
the cuffs of his pajamas down so they would

cover his aching legs.

A simple request, but, making it,  
he made a place for me that defined  
our companionship as no words could.

Allowing me to serve him in that seemingly  
insignificant way, he offered me a glimpse of  
the kind of intimacy God yearns to have  
with each of us.” (Pause)

Beloved of God, when we think of Jesus’ hands  
upon the disciple’s feet, might we remember  
the ways our hands have gently pulled down  
the pajama cuffs of those whom we  
have loved to the end.

Might we recall the times when we drew  
the quilt down to keep their feet warm and  
that Jesus wishes to be that close to us,  
and serve us in ways that are  
too great for words.

Can we let Him get that close to us;  
make ourselves that vulnerable?

If we can take such an act of love then  
we can surely make that love present in all  
the things we say and do.

AMEN!