

A Time Called... Maundy Thursday

We speak of the church year, but break it into smaller bits like Lent. A still smaller bit of Lent is Holy Week, and an even smaller bit is Maundy Thursday. At each step our focus sharpens as we move from a wide-angle lens to a close-up shot. Through today's lens we see the events of Maundy Thursday.

Tracing the Historical Roots of Maundy Thursday

The name comes from the Latin *mandatum novum* (“new commandment” – John 13:34) from the story of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet. A footwashing service dates to the 7th Century when bishops and abbots used it to symbolize their servanthood. Now it is for any, and all. A celebration of the Lord’s Supper in commemoration of its institution dates to the 4th Century. In our tradition, however, the celebration of the Lord’s Supper always goes beyond historical concerns to its fullest meaning as a sacrament. Possibly the oldest act (now extinct) was a public reconciliation for the penitents prior, to readmission to communion at Easter. The stripping of the chancel and sanctuary of any decoration and colour has possible origins in 7th Century Spain.

Finding Meaning In the Tradition

These riches are a lot to put into one service. Perhaps one thing will stand out for us. In the footwashing we might see that it is not the act which gives meaning, but who’s doing it that carries the message of radical servanthood. In the Lord’s Supper we may focus on God’s gifts strengthening us to face tomorrow in faith. We remember the commandment to love one another and ask for a new beginning in love. We can remove the colour and decoration of our sanctuary, symbolising the colour and creativity that left the world when Jesus died – leaving that story to stand unadorned.



Questions for Personal Meditation

1. In what ways am I learning to love?
2. Is it harder for me to serve another, or let another serve me? Where is Jesus asking for growth?
3. What, for me, is the link between the Lord’s supper and this time in Holy Week?
4. If things of colour and decoration were removed from the sanctuary, how did that affect me?