

Maundy Thursday



- (1) John 13.34.
- (2) Luke 22.7ff.
- (3) Mark 14.12ff.
- (4) Mark 14.21.
- (5) John 13.18-30.
- (6) I Corinthians 11.23-26.
- (7) Hebrews 8.7-13.
- (8) Revelation 13.8.
- (9) John 1.29.

The following day was Yom Chamishi, the fifth day of the Jewish week. We refer to this day as Thursday, which originates from "Thor's Day," named after the Norse god Thor. In Christianity, this particular Thursday is known as "Maundy Thursday." The word "Maundy" is derived from the old French "mande" and the Latin mandatum, which also gives us the English term "mandate." Thus, Maundy Thursday marks the day when, during their Last Supper, Jesus gave his disciples a mandate to love one another.(1)

Maundy Thursday was a soul-shaping day for Peter. Jesus asked Peter and John to go into Jerusalem and procure a room in which to enjoy the Passover meal. (2) They went from Bethany into the city, found the room, and prepared the meal.(3)

As Jesus and the twelve ate together, Jesus predicted his betrayal. He added that it would be better for the traitor if he had not been born.(4) John was sitting next to Jesus. Peter told John to ask Jesus which of the disciples was the traitor. Jesus implicated Judas by dipping a piece of bread into the dish and giving it to him. At that moment, Satan entered Judas again and he left the supper.(5)

The Eucharist. After Judas left, Jesus instituted the ceremony that Christians have called the Eucharist for the last 2,000 years. Paul the Apostle, in writing to the Corinthians, described it this way,

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (6)

Jesus was instituting a new covenant, to replace God's covenant with Abraham(7), one in which the grace, forgiveness, and love of God would dominate. In the tradition of the sacrificial Passover lamb, by the breaking of his body and shedding of his blood on the cross, he would soon be the lamb that was slain,(8) and as John, the Baptist described him, "...the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"(9)

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Humility and cleansing. Jesus didn't just talk about grace, forgiveness, and love. He demonstrated it through humility and cleansing. Assuming the position of a humble servant, he rose from the table, took his outer garment off, wrapped a towel around his waist, got a bowl of water, and began to wash the feet of his disciples and dry them with the towel wrapped around his waist.

Peter shunned Jesus' plan to wash his feet. But Jesus said, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." Peter replied, "Then, Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" (1)

John's gospel reports,

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." (2)

Jesus' humble act of service on the eve of his crucifixion left an indelible mark on Peter's soul.

Later, in his first epistle, Peter wrote,

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. (3)

Thus, Peter learned that humble service, rather than selfish pride, is the path to favor with God and men. (4) He also discovered that his relationship with Jesus depended upon his willingness to accept the cleansing that Jesus offered.

Jesus' grim prediction. Jesus continued to serve up "spiritual soul-shaping fastballs" to Peter, interactions that would teach him through trauma. Some months earlier, Jesus and his disciples went to Judea to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. (5) This occurred after Peter watched Jesus feed the five thousand and walk on water. Moses had mandated that the Jews observe this feast on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after the harvest. It was a fall festival. (6)

This was several months before Maundy Thursday. The temple leaders were already staunchly opposed to Jesus and ready to kill him on this visit to Jerusalem, but it was not God's time for Jesus to die. (7) Jesus said to them, "I am with you for only a short time, and then I am going to the one who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come." (8) His enemies speculated that he was going to leave Judea to teach the Jews scattered throughout the Roman Empire.

This encounter with the temple leaders happened in the fall before Jesus and his disciples shared the Passover meal in the upper room and Jesus washed their feet. After Jesus washed their feet, he revisited his statement from months earlier by saying, "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come." (9) John's Gospel records Peter's response,

Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later." Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times! (10)

Thus, Jesus stunned Peter with the grim prediction that his faith would fail in the face of a hostile mob, and that before the next day.

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Sleepy Peter. Jesus and his disciples sang a hymn, left the upper room, and went east through the Kidron Valley(1) to a place called Gethsemane, a grove at the foot of the Mount of Olives.(2) Judas knew this place well because they met there regularly.(3) By going there, it was as if Jesus knew the hour of death was upon him and wanted to make it easy for Judas to do his dastardly work.

When they arrived at the grove, Jesus took Peter, James, and John a stone's throw aside. Knowing his arrest was imminent, Jesus prayed in anguish with his face in the dirt, hoping there was another way but submitting to the will of His heavenly Father.(4) His sweat was like drops of blood falling into the dirt(5) as he implored God with loud cries, tears, and reverence.(6) Jesus had told Peter, James, and John that he was deeply grieved, to the point of death(7), and asked them to watch with him while he struggled with the looming threat of crucifixion, but he returned from prayer three times to find them sleeping.The first time, he woke Peter up and implored him to watch.(8) But Peter dozed off again. Sleepy Peter's inability to keep his eyes open and watch, stood in stark contrast to Jesus' soul-wrenching negotiation with his Father. Jesus woke Peter, James, and John, and urged them, "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."(9)

Violent Peter. Jesus and his disciples were alone in Gethsemane, vulnerable, away from the crowd that might riot if they saw him being arrested.Judas seized the opportunity and showed up with a large detachment of soldiers as well as some of the chief priests and Pharisees. His treacherous friends were carrying torches, lanterns, swords, and clubs.(10)

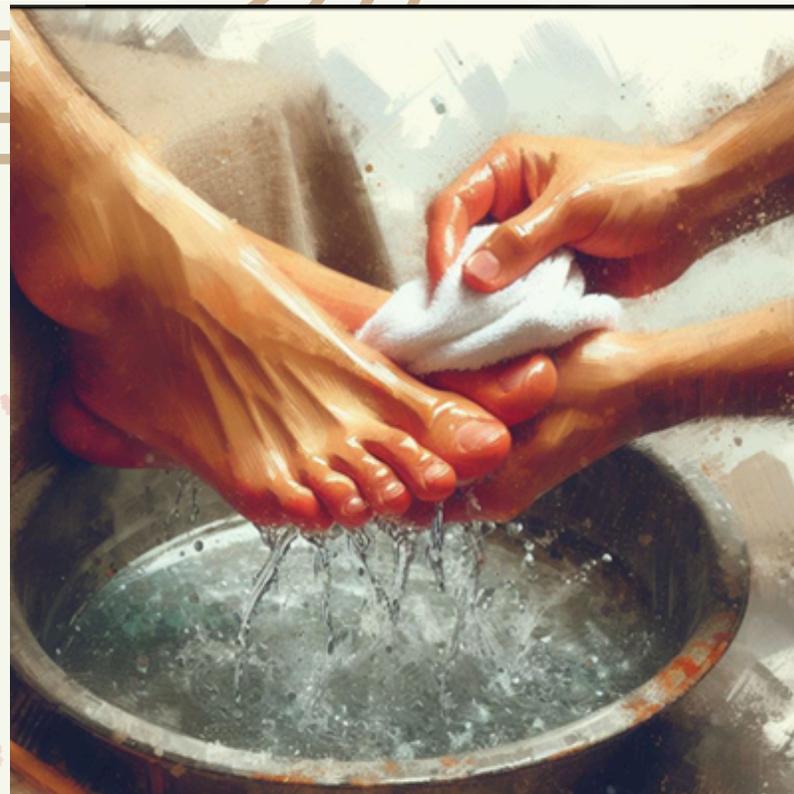
Judas had agreed to implicate Jesus by kissing him. When Judas attempted to do so, Jesus asked, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"(11) Then, the soldiers arrested him. One of the men with Judas was Malchus. He was the servant of Caiaphas, the High Priest.When they seized Jesus, Peter drew his sword and cut Malchus' ear off. But Jesus picked the ear up, healed Malchus, stopped his followers from starting a skirmish, and went away peacefully.

Darkness reigns.Jesus told the temple leaders, "...this is your hour—when darkness reigns."(12) They seized him and led him away to the palace of Caiaphas, the High Priest. The teachers of the law and elders assembled there for a speedy, rigged trial.

Peter followed at a distance, entered Caiaphas' courtyard, and sat down with the guards.(13) He was warming himself by a fire when a servant girl recognized and identified him as having been with Jesus. Peter denied knowing him. In a while, another accused him of being one of Jesus' followers.He denied it a second time.Luke's gospel records Peter's final failure, "About an hour later another asserted, 'Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.' Peter replied, 'Man, I don't know what you're talking about!' Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed."(14) As Zechariah the prophet predicted, "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered..."(15)Remembering Jesus' prediction of his denial, he broke down and wept bitterly.(16)

The temple leaders conducted a false trial and condemned Jesus to death. The trial was done in darkness because they wanted to pervert justice and use the court to murder him "legally". He appeared before the Sanhedrin. Annas, Caiaphas' father-in-law examined him and found him innocent, so he sent him to Caiaphas to be tried formally (and illegally at night) before the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin convicted him of blasphemy, spat on him, blindfolded him, and beat him.(17)

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- (10) John 13.1-9.
- (11) John 13.12-17.
- (12) I Peter 5.5-6.
- (13) Proverbs 3.4.
- (14) John 7.1ff.
- (15) Leviticus 23.33ff.
- (16) John 7.30.
- (17) John 7.33-34.
- (18) John 13.33.
- (19) John 13.36-38.
- (20) John 18.1.
- (21) Mark 14.26.
- (22) John 18.1-2.
- (23) Matthew 26.36ff.
- (24) Luke 22.44.
- (25) Hebrews 5.7.
- (26) Matthew 26.38.
- (27) Mark 14.37.
- (28) Lke 22.46.
- (29) John 18.1ff.
- (30) Luke 22.48.
- (31) Luke 22.53.
- (32) Matthew 26.58.
- (33) Luke 22.59-60.
- (34) Zechariah 13.7.
- (35) Mark 14.72.
- (36) Mark 14.63-65.

This account is an excerpt from
Solid Saint: How Peter Became a Rock