

Maundy Thursday 2020

Please note: As with many traditional Maundy Thursday services this act of worship ends abruptly with no Blessing

During this service I invite you to gather together a basin or large bowl with warm water, a bar of soap or hand wash, a jug or mug, a small soft towel, and a small piece of bread near you on a table. It would be best to gather these items together before you start the service.

Lord, we come to remember your anguish in Gethsemane as you faced the awful cost of your calling. Lord as we come close to you, we know that you are always close to us.

Words of reflection: A meditation for Maundy Thursday based on John 13:1-12

My time has come, and still you don't understand. How can I make it clear to you?

Can I wash away your prejudices, misconceptions and mistakes and open your eyes to what I shall be doing when I wash the feet of the world and cleanse all sin away?

I need to overturn all complacency, to wash away the stains of pride, the grasp of power and focus your attention on the ultimate significance of loving service.

Although you were too proud to wash each other's feet.

Very soon on Calvary, in utter devotion and humility, the Holy One will wash the feet of the whole world.

Do you find it easier to give ... or to receive?

Is it easy to accept love ... and to receive forgiveness?

Do you feel unworthy of generous or unexpected gifts, as if you need to earn what you get?

Do you prefer to serve or be served?

How do you cope with demonstrative behaviour when you are on the receiving end?

John 13:1-17 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason, he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So, if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are

messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Let me take you back to that Passover festival.

Come with me through the hot, dry streets of the holy city, dust rising from your sandals, coating your sweltering feet and clinging between your toes.

Come this way. Slip through the crowds, along the narrow alleyways till you see the stairway to the upper room. Come on up. Bend down, through the low doorway, into the flickering lamplight. We're all friends together here, companions and fellow disciples. Come to find the centre of our universe: Jesus, welcoming us all to sit round his table.

There's a mouth-watering smell of roasted lamb and fragrant fresh bread, making you realise how hungry you are.

We celebrate the Passover, when our people, slaves in Egypt, were saved from death by the blood of Passover lambs, and Pharaoh at last agreed to let the people go. The blood that was shed bought our freedom.

Jesus seems quiet and pensive. I wonder what is coming. Perhaps he's tired after all his teaching and debating.

As we share the bread he has broken, we half notice that he's left his seat and is removing his outer garments – his rabbi's robes.

When he turns round, he has a towel tied around his waist and he's coming towards us with a bowl of water in his hands.

He kneels down at the end of the table, and has already begun to wash the feet of the nearest person before they realise who is doing it. We fall silent. All eyes are on him. He pours the water over, cleansing gently, firmly, like our mothers may have done when we were little children. Towelling the feet dry, unhurriedly, then moving on to the next. We feel so small. We're struck dumb. We've never done this, even for each other. This is the job of the lowliest servant; we are respectable people. There aren't any servants here tonight and it would be undignified for us to do it. It isn't our responsibility. It isn't our place. It would be demeaning. Except ... except how often has he told us how we must serve as he does ... But surely not like this?

Our Lord and leader, our friend and teacher, the one who reveals God to us, is on his knees, doing it for us.

Peter starts up when it comes to his turn. 'No, No. This is all wrong. You'll not do this for me Jesus. I can't have it. I won't allow it!'

Jesus replies, 'I must do this for you, Peter. You will come to understand.'

'Never! I'll follow you, protect you, fight for you, die for you. But not this.'

'Unless I wash you, you can have no part in me.'

'Wash then, my hands and my feet too.'

'Just your feet. Once your feet are clean you will be a new person.'

As the dirt of Peter's feet is washed away, his bravado seems to be washed away too

In pairs:

If there is someone else in your household, try and do this in pairs. You are invited to place the bowl with the warm water in front of you. As the other person holds their hands over the water, palms down, you wash their hands. You might like to cup your hands or use the jug and pour water over their hands. Soap up your hands and wash their hands (as if you were washing the hands of a small child, who is too young to do it for themselves. Think about

washing each finger individually, massaging down to the tips. Turn their hands over and wash the palms. Take your time, there is no rush. Try **not** to allow the other person to take over and wash their own hands. This is about them permitting you to do this, just as the disciples allowed Jesus to serve them. Rinse their hands and dry with the towel, once again try **not** to permit them to dry their own hands. Now swap over and you have your hands washed in the same way.

OR

As a single person:

If you are on your own, I invite you to slowly pour water from the jug over your left hand and using the soap or hand-wash, wash this first hand. Take your time massaging down each finger to the tips and then the palm, massaging the palm with the thumb of your other hand. Rinse and repeat on the right hand. Now with the towel very slowly and gently dry your hands.

Reflect on how that felt, physically, emotionally, spiritually.

Did you feel humble, cleansed, embarrassed, honoured, or was it something else?

Were the feelings different when you thought about being the one receiving or being the one doing? If you're happy to do so, share your feelings with each other.

Jesus comes and kneels at your feet.

What do you say?

He runs the water over your tiredness, your hurt, your guilt, your past regrets and washes it all away. What does he say to you?

'If 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 to you.'

Thought for today

It is common during a communion celebration for Ministers to say the bread is Jesus' body, "broken for you." But is "broken" the correct word to use? Let's look at the four passages that mention the bread and Jesus' body:

Matthew 26: 26 While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."

Mark 14: 22 And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body."

Luke 22: 19 And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

1 Corinthians 11:24 ...when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Reflection

Some of you may recall that I have spoken about this before, but I believe that there is no harm in revisiting this for the benefit of others. The word “broke” is used in each passage, but every time it refers to Jesus breaking bread. The text never says Jesus’ body is “broken for you.” Matthew and Mark only record Jesus saying “this is my body.” In Luke, Jesus says His body is “given” for you. In 1 Corinthians, Paul quotes Jesus as saying His body is “for you.”

So where does the phrase “broken for you” come from? It is from a textual difference of 1 Corinthians 11:24. And more importantly, it is included in the translation of the King James Version—“Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you.” Given the massive influence of the King James Bible on the English-speaking world, this means the phrase “broken for you” has become a part of the tradition of many churches. Having stated that; it should be noted that none of the services in the current Methodist Worship Book, and even those dating back to 1936, use the phrase ‘broken for you.’

So yes, some manuscripts of 1 Corinthians 11:24 actually say, “This is my body which is broken for you.”

But is this textual variant correct? Probably not. It is not found in the majority of manuscripts, and the reading is at odds with the parallel accounts in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Many scholars believe that, scribes seemed to have added words to try to explain Paul’s concise quotation of Jesus (“This is my body which is for you”). It is therefore likely that the variant “broken” used for Jesus’ body in 1 Corinthians 11:24 was added by a scribe because the text used the same word to describe Jesus’ “breaking” of bread.

A Theological Basis for Rejecting “Broken”

However, there is also a theological reason why we should not say that Jesus’ body was “broken.” This is because Scripture is quite clear that Jesus’ body was not broken, even in death. John 19:33-36 says,

But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken.”

John is clear that Jesus’ legs were not broken. In fact, John quotes Psalm 34:20 that none of his “bones” were broken. This is because Jesus is “our Passover lamb” who was sacrificed for our sins (1 Corinthians 5:7). And the Passover lamb was not to have any of its bones broken:

It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones (Exodus 12:46).

They shall leave none of it until the morning, nor break any of its bones; according to all the statute for the Passover they shall keep it (Numbers 9:12).

I invite you to reflect on the words in the readings. What difference can you see in the understanding between Christ being 'broken' and Christ being a 'Gift'?

Think of some words to describe what it means to be 'Broken'. Here are some of the ones I thought of: destroyed, ruined, faulty, defective, out of order, beaten, stopped, overwhelmed, failed, surpassed. None of these words speak to me of the Christ who died and was raised for us all. Gift and Given on the other hand means; present, ability, offering, capacity, absolute, provide, deliver, imparted, shared, dedicated, sacrificed. I know which I would rather have; and that is a Christ who is given for me and not broken.

**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.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.**

Pick up the small piece of bread and place it in the palm of your hand. As you have just prayed '*Give us today our daily bread.*' You might like to thank God for the food you have and reflect on other blessings. Contemplate on the fact that Christ is a gift to you and the symbol of that gift is this bread. So simple so ordinary so commonplace and yet so extraordinary and remarkable. Take and eat; this is God's gift to you.

You may like to sing one of the hymns based on the 23 Psalm.

When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. If you have a garden and you are able, I invite you to go outside into the garden. Or close your eye and imagine being in a garden. What might it have been like for Jesus and the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane?

Jesus said "**Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.**"