

Maundy Thursday in four questions –

a time of remembering, reflection and prayer



Preparation:

You may like to do this after you have had a meal together – one that has a bit of a Middle Eastern flavour – dips, olives, falafel, grapes, figs – it needn't be fancy.

Have these elements on your table, they are props for the readings, they could be covered during your meal and uncovered as you begin

- *Lavash or another form of unleavened bread*
- *Bowl of water and towel*
- *Candle*
- *Cup/wine glass*
- *Paper and pens/pencils*

Have a basket or box on hand to pack the elements into at the end of the service.

Another alternative is to have four candles on the table and ask the questions as you light each in in this way – ‘Why do we light this candle?’ With the response – ‘We light this candle to remember...’

The service:

Uncover the table elements and light the candle.

There are things on our table that might not normally be there, let's look at what's on the table and think about why it is there.

Question: Why is there unleavened bread on the table?

We have unleavened bread on our table to remember the Passover. Passover is an important festival for people of the Jewish faith, the tradition from which our faith comes.



Each year Jewish families gather together to recall the days when the people of Israel were slaves in Egypt and how they escaped from this slavery.

On the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Nisan, after the equinox, this involves a Pesach meal, a meal of roast meat with matzah (unleavened bread) and bitter herbs. This is a meal that Jesus shared with his friends.

We read the story of the first Passover here:

Reading: Exodus 12:1 - 14

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ²This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. ³Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. ⁴If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. ⁵Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. ⁷They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ⁹Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. ¹⁰You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. ¹¹This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the LORD. ¹²For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. ¹³The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

¹⁴This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

Consider: Before they left Egypt, the children of Israel were asked to stay home so that an the 10th plague would pass over them – once this had happened, they would be set free. That is an interesting idea that we can consider as we stay home this Maundy Thursday and await COVID-19 to pass over.

Prayer:

- As we remember and retell the story of when the children of Israel were slaves, God grant us compassion and understanding for people who are persecuted and enslaved and confined in prison.

- We also think of what personally holds us back, how we are confined from living a full life.

Like many Jewish holidays, Passover is a time to be grateful and to express this gratitude. One of the songs sung after the meal, inspires people to be grateful for what they have and recognize that everything we have at that very moment is enough. Let's sing a song of thanks for all God gives us.

Song: Thank You Father for Everything

Question: Why is there a bowl and towel on the table?

We have a bowl and towel on the table to remember a significant moment when Jesus upside-downs the way of the world when he washes his friends' feet.



In Jesus' time, the roads and floors of most house were dirt, and most people wore sandals not full shoes. When you were welcoming people into your house, one of the first things you would do is offer them the chance to wash their feet. This was usually done by a servant or a child.

This is what the bible tells us happened as Jesus washed his disciples' feet:

Reading: 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. ²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table,^[a] took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then 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. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet,^[a] but is entirely clean. And you^[a] are clean, though not all of you." ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹²After 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? ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, servants^[a] are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Consider: The upside-downing Jesus does is to set an example, to show how those who have privilege and power need to be servants rather than masters, to be humble and kind and loving, not people who rule over others. Jesus says that we will have a fulfilled and happy life when we learn to love others the way God loves us. What does that mean for how we might live our lives?

Prayer:

- It is easy to put ourselves before other people, we know what we need because we live in our own skin. It is harder to know what others need - we don’t walk in their shoes. Please forgive us God when we have often been self-absorbed, caring more about ourselves than about others.

Song: Strangest Ways by Robin Mann

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JJKqYu45rk&list=PLa9UR53smpFwxkZxwnqLEQ0mUJVGa8N_X&index=4

Question: Why is there a candle on the table?

We have a candle on the table to remind us of the new commandment Jesus gave his friends.

After washing his friends’ feet Jesus spoke about what was ahead of him, the way he would die. He also talked to them about the way they should live, a new way of living the way of God.



Reading: John 13: 31 - 35

³¹When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³²If God has been glorified in him,^[a] God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one

another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Consider: ‘Maundy’ comes from a Latin word ‘mandatum’ which means ‘commandment’, and so it seems right that this Maundy Thursday, we remember the words of the new commandment and think about what it means for us to love one another and be the light of God’s love in our world.

Prayer:

- Help us, God, to see the places we can live out this new commandment to love one another, to be attentive to people and places in the world that need care and compassion, to know how we might attend to those needs.

Song: A New Commandment I Give Unto You

Question: Why is there a special glass on the table?

There is a glass on the table to remember the last meal Jesus had with his friends before he died, a meal we call the Last Supper.

The table was set with all the things needed for the Passover meal and during the meal Jesus did something that was unexpected, he created a way for the disciples to remember him when he was no longer with them. Re-enacting the actions and words of that night, became a way for the disciples to not only remember Jesus but also to nourish their hearts and souls as they lived God’s way. It has become a way for us remember Jesus and for us to be nourished as we live God’s way. Every time we have communion. we use the words Jesus spoke that night.



This is the story of what happened during that last supper.

Reading: Matthew 26: 17 - 35

¹⁷On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?” ¹⁸He said, “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’” ¹⁹So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

²⁰When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve;^[a] ²¹and while they were eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.” ²²And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, “Surely not I, Lord?” ²³He answered, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. ²⁴The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been

born.” ²⁵ Judas, who betrayed him, said, “Surely not I, Rabbi?” He replied, “You have said so.”

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.” ²⁷ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; ²⁸ for this is my blood of the ²⁹ covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

³⁰ When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

³¹ Then Jesus said to them, “You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written,

‘I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’

³² But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.” ³³ Peter said to him, “Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.” ³⁴ Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” ³⁵ Peter said to him, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And so said all the disciples.

Consider: Jesus shared this meal with all his friends, including Judas, who he knew would betray him to the authorities. All of us, no matter who we are, where we live, or how we think about ourselves, are welcome in God’s family, to join in the feast at God’s table. Who are the people, family, friends, that are not with us around our table, that we want to remember tonight?

Prayer:

- God, we pray for those who are without food tonight even though there is enough to feed the whole world.
- We pray for those who feel they aren’t welcome and have no place in which to find comfort and reassurance
- We give thanks for the nourishment you give our bodies and our minds so that we might be people who nourish the world.

An act of gratitude to end

Tonight, we have retold part of God’s story of salvation, we have thought about what this means for us and how we are also part of God’s family. We have learnt that we can be confident in the love God has for us.

By remembering,

- The Passover – we have learnt that God’s way is one of liberation
- Jesus washing his disciples’ feet – we have learnt that God’s way is one of service
- The new commandment – we have learnt that God’s way is one of love
- The last supper – we have learnt that God will nourish and sustain us as we live God’s way

Pack the elements away or extinguish the candles, and if you are able to, go outside and look for the moon, if not the moon, look at the stars.

You can also do this last act if you choose to stay inside.

The last thing Jesus did before his arrest was go into the garden to pray. What comes next is part of the story that we believe is the fulfillment of God’s promise of salvation. We remember that Jesus didn’t come to the world just for the salvation of people, he came for all the world, everything within it.

Reading: John 3:16-17

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷ “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

These can be the last words you speak, stay where and as you are as long as you would like to or can, soaking up the beauty of a nearly full moon.

