

Holy Week Commentary
Hyattstown Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

April, 2020

The Tradition of Maundy Thursday (John 13:1-17, 31-35)

We Christians observe with appropriate devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection. Our custom is to prepare for Easter by a season of penitence, fasting, and prayer. In the past, the forty days of Lent provided a time in which converts to the faith were prepared for baptism into the body of Christ, and a time when persons whose sins had separated them from the community were reconciled by forgiveness and restored to the fellowship. As a congregation, then, we are reminded of the mercy proclaimed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the need we all have to renew our baptismal faith.

The "road to Jerusalem", on which we embarked on Ash Wednesday, has brought us now to "Maundy Thursday". Also known as "Holy Thursday", it commemorates the institution of the Lord's Supper, and is the oldest of the Holy Week observances. The word "*maund*", from the Latin "*mandatum novum*", implies a "*new commandment*". Maundy Thursday is set aside to remember Christ's redemptive act, and it is our opportunity to celebrate the last meal that Christ shared with His disciples.

As a substitute for the feast which we would normally share when together in our sanctuary, I invite you to spiritually adapt your own Thursday evening supper. Partake of it as a way to remember individually or with your family that Jesus shared a "last supper" with the twelve.

The Tradition of Passover (Exodus 12)

What we know and observe today as the Last Supper was in fact then a celebration of the Jewish Passover meal. Jesus gathered with his disciples on the evening of the “seder”. As usual on such a holiday, the town of Jerusalem was crowded with observant Jews. The Passover feast was an annual event commemorating the release of the children of Israel, who had been enslaved in Egypt for 400 years. The angel of death “passed over” the houses of the Israelites after they performed the rite of blood that would provide protection. Each year at the seder supper, families would recall the 10 plagues and the mighty hand of God that freed them from slavery. To this celebration, Jesus placed himself as the sacrificial Lamb, and His blood as the new wine of forgiveness.

The Tradition of the Last Supper (I Corinthians 11:23-26)

In the context of the Passover, on this night we remember the final supper Jesus shared with his disciples. This event, which reveals the holiness of all subsequent meals eaten in His name, institutes the mystery of His abiding redemptive presence in the church’s celebrations of the Lord’s Supper, or Holy Communion, or Eucharist. Maundy Thursday marks the beginning of the most solemn yet joyful observance of the entire Christian Year, the three days in which Jesus died, was buried, and rose again.

As they shared the Passover meal together, Jesus and the disciples remembered God’s acts of deliverance in their history. Jesus created a new act of deliverance that unfolds throughout Holy Week. During the meal Judas left to arrange for the betrayal of Jesus. After the meal, Jesus and the disciples departed the Upper Room for the Garden of

Gethsemane, where Jesus agonized in prayer as his crucifixion drew nearer. The scriptures offer vivid reports of the suffering of Jesus, as his human nature struggled with the redemptive plan of God. Whenever we celebrate Holy Communion, we remember that Jesus emptied himself so that our joy might be full, and that he fed the hungry, healed the afflicted, ate with the scorned, washed his disciples' feet, and gave a holy meal as the pledge of his abiding presence.

The Tradition of Good Friday (John 18 and 19)

As Holy Week unfolds consistent with the witness of the scriptures, Christians observe Good Friday, or "God" Friday. We commemorate Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion, suffering, death, and burial. To the extent possible, we experience some sense of the loneliness, pain, and humiliation that Christ endured as he journeyed with his cross to Golgotha. Collectively, the Gospels record seven last words of Christ on the Cross:

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" ... "Today, you will be with me in paradise" ... "Woman, behold your son" ... "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" ... "I am thirsty" ... "It is finished" ... "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"

As our souls are laid bare by the supreme sacrifice of Jesus for us, so the chancel is usually laid bare of the symbols of our faith. In sorrow on Good Friday, we are left to contemplate the extent of our own responsibility for the death dealt to Jesus. We are left to consider the new commandment, that we love one another.

What we have yet to discover is that, though Friday is threatening, Sunday is coming!!