

Holy Thursday

The Gathering ...

This is the night, on which Jesus gathered in the upper room, with the disciples, with all the women and children, to share a meal with them. This is the night on which he washed their feet, in subversive love. This is the night on which he gave us the greatest gift – the gift of the Eucharist, the Holy Communion, The mass. The night on which, amongst all the pain of betrayal and hurt... he gave thanks, blessing, and gave his very self to us. This is the night on which he went to face his agony....

Lord, we bring ourselves this night to join with you, just as we are. We cannot this year celebrate this night as our hearts yearn and ache to do. We cannot share in your Holy Mass together, we cannot share in physical communion with each other.

And yet, we still meet in love. We give you thanks for the miracles of technology, and for the fact that all your Church, all your creation, is joined together on this night, in prayer and praise and thanksgiving with you. For where there is love, there is God. And love.... has its seeds everywhere.

On this night Jesus said....

Scripture

Little 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." I give you a new commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another....

Song

An Upper Room did our Lord prepare
for those he loved until the end:
and his disciples still gather there
to celebrate their Risen Friend.

A lasting gift Jesus gave his own:
to share his bread, his loving cup.
Whatever burdens may bow us down,
he by his Cross shall lift us up.

And after Supper he washed their feet
for service, too, is sacrament.
In him our joy shall be made complete –
sent out to serve, as he was sent.

The washing

Scripture:

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.

Imagine...

Lord, you removed your outer robes, you stood in a plain shift, with no distinguishing features... no different to a slave. Just as the day you were born, naked in the stable, wrapped in a swaddling cloth. The day you laid aside your clothes to plunge into the Jordan river to be baptised, blessing all baptism, all water, with your beloved body. The day you hung on a cross, bloodied and bruised, naked and exposed. Because there's something about all humanity; under our robes we are all the same... naked, vulnerable, and needing each other.

Lord, as you laid aside your robes, help us to lay aside our protective and distinguishing layers, help us to be known by our love, giving and received.

Scripture...

Then he poured water into a basin

*At the beginning of creation, there was water...
ruffled under the wings of the Holy Spirit, the
song of the Word.*

*Held in the hands of the Creator of all that is,
was and will be.*

The source of life.

*Put your hands in it now... fully beneath the
surface, as on that day at the Jordan when the
heaven's split open with words of Love... when
all water was blessed by the body of our Lord.*

*But now... now it is our bodies,
and the water poured by the one who gives us
water that will never leave us thirsty again.*

*Cool, washing us, washing us of preconceptions,
of pride, of shame.*

*a torrent undermining our foundations,
Reshaping our landscape*

*And yet... around our callouses, our hardened
skin, our tender hidden arches, intimate hands
of love.*

*Love, laying aside clothes of majesty, glory,
clouds of power and might,*

Love, kneeling at our feet.

... 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,

Imagine... Peter surges to his feet in shock and anger. His Lord and master demeaning himself, doing the job of a slave... or a woman. Foot washing is no job for the Lord.... And there are women present, is he going to wash their feet too?

... and Simon Peter 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.'

'You do not know now what I am doing'

We did not know:

*when you took off the robe of power
and knelt before the water.*

We did not know:

*when your love took away from us
the dirt of a weary road.*

But now we can see:

*In the work of carers and nurses
in hospitals and homes.*

*Every dressing changed, every bedpan emptied,
every breath eased, every foot washed:
a sacrament of care.*

Teach us the new commandment:

*a revolution of love
beyond shame and honour
beyond power and control.*

*Teach us the authority of service given,
community created,
hope renewed
in the shadow of death and fear.*

'You do not know now what I am doing

But later you will understand.'

Fr. Steven Shakespeare, shared with permission

*This homely act
this simple task
this humble posture
has stripped pride to its waist*

*This wiping of dust
washing the grit and cracks
from tired and weary feet.*

*This simple glory
turns the world on her heel
pivoting from pomp to presence
revealing the hard worn aches
of hidden sacred places.*

*This transformation
This revolution
This holiest communion*

Barbara Glasson, President of the Methodist Conference

And yet, at times, isn't it almost the harder part to be the one served? To allow ourselves that vulnerability, that nakedness, to confess our need one for the other? Jesus kneels at our feet and serves us, but he is also the one served.

Scripture...

Jesus says: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me... just as you did it to one of the least of these who is a member of my family, you did it to me."

Foot washing is about so much more than laying down shame and pride in order to serve another. Foot washing is about there being no pride or shame to lay down. Just love.. ebbing and flooding like a full sea in tide, first to one shore, then another. Sometimes we will serve, and sometimes we will receive service in our need. Because we all need each other. And both are forms of giving. For in this mutual interlocking of living and loving, there in humanity grown to fulness, there in the Trinity-dance of Love ... there is God... the one whose feet were anointed, who washes our feet...

Let us pray...

*Strange and disturbing Lord Jesus,
whose feet were caressed with perfume
and a woman's hair,
you humbly took a basin and towel
and washed the feet of your friends.
Wash us also in your tenderness
as we touch one another,
That, embracing your service freely,
We may accept no other slavery in your name*

Janet Morley

The breaking, the sharing

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.

Mark 14: 22-24

Imagine...

The self-giving love of God knows no end. He kneels, robes laid aside, in intimate love at our feet, calling us to see that place as the place of God. Intimate, close. But yet.. now closer still.

This is our human, our material physical God, uniting his very self with ours.

'You are what you eat', so the saying goes. What we eat becomes part of our very bloodstream, the substance of our bones and organs.

When Jesus ate bread and wine, like us, this became his body too. Now, tonight, he – our Creator Lord – makes this happen outside his body, so that we too might eat his very self, and make it ours.

Our body, washed by his body, nourished by his body, one with his body.

At the last Supper Jesus tells his disciples to eat in remembrance of him. Of all the things.. Jesus chose a meal, that most ordinary of acts, choosing the unremarkable, plain and abundant; bread and wine. He didn't explain deep theology to them, he gave them acts to share. Washing, serving, eating together.

Nourishment is always far more than biological nutrition. We are nourished by our communities. We are nourished by gratitude. We are nourished by justice. We are nourished when we know and love our neighbours.

We become people who feed on the bread of life together and are sent out as stewards of redemption

Christ is our bread, and gives us bread. He is the gift and the giver. God gives us every physical meal we eat, every nourishment of love, and hope, and joy.. and every nourishment is ultimately partial... pointing to him who is our true food, our eternal nourishment.

In this time, when we may not meet together to share in the Eucharist, in the Very Body of God, we can share in nourishment together, in cooking and eating meals, in sending food to the foodbanks, or giving it to our neighbours, in acts of love, justice and compassion. And we can give thanks - even as our hearts ache - in the presence of our Lord.

Bidding Prayers

Jesus of courage and justice,
because you broke bread with the poor,
you were looked on with contempt.

Because you broke bread
with the sinful and outcast,
you were looked on as ungodly.

Because you broke bread with the joyful
**You were called a wine-bibber
and a glutton**

Because you broke bread in the upper room,
**You sealed your acceptance of the way
of the cross**

Hymn

Bread of heaven, on thee we feed,
for thou art our food indeed.
Ever may our souls be fed
with this true and living Bread,
day by day with strength supplied
through the life of Christ who died.

Vine of heaven, thy love supplies
this blest cup of sacrifice.
'Tis thy wounds our healing give;
to thy cross we look and live.
Thou our life! O let us be
rooted, grafted, built on thee.

Intercessions

Father, on this, the night he was betrayed,
your Son Jesus Christ
washed his disciples' feet.
We commit ourselves
to follow his example of love and service.
Lord, hear us

On this night,
he prayed for his disciples to be one.
We pray for the unity of your Church.
Lord hear us

On this night,
he prayed for those who were to believe
through his disciples' message.
We pray that we may have a story to share,
and confidence and grace to share it.
Lord hear us

On this night,
he commanded his disciples to love,
but suffered rejection himself.
We pray for the rejected and unloved.
Lord, hear us

On this night,
he reminded his disciples
that if the world hated them it hated him first.
We pray for those who are persecuted
for their faith.
Lord, hear us.

On this night, he accepted the cup of death
and looked forward to the wine
of the new kingdom.
We remember those who have died in the
peace of Christ.
Lord, hear us

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father,
which art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come,
thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive them
that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.**

To watch and pray...

After supper, Jesus left the upper room, and went out. Jesus often went out to pray, alone, seeking solitude from the crowds. But now, on this night of nights, something in him reaches for human solidarity. He takes with him a few close disciples...

Scripture...

Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." And he took Peter, James, and John with him, and he began to be troubled and deeply distressed. Then he said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch."

Mark 14: 32- 34

Song

Stay with me, remain here with me. Watch and pray, watch and pray.

Psalmody

During which the reserved sacrament is placed for us to wait and watch with our Lord.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me*
And are so far from my salvation, from the
words of my distress?

O my God, I cry in the daytime,
but you do not answer*
and by night also, but I find no rest.

Yet you are the Holy One*
Enthroned upon the praises of Israel.

Our forebears trusted in you*
they trusted, and you delivered them.

They cried out to you and were delivered*
They put their trust in you
and were not confounded.

But as for me, I am a worm, and no man*
Scorned by all and despised by the people.

All who see me laugh me to scorn*
They curl their lips
and wag their heads, saying*
'he trusted in the Lord; let him deliver him*
Let him deliver him, if he delights in him'.

But it is you that took me out of the womb*
And laid me safe upon my mother's breast.

On you was I cast ever since I was born*
You are my God
even from my mother's womb.

Be not far from me,
for trouble is near at hand*
And there is none to help.

I am poured out like water;
All my bones are out of joint;
My heart has become like wax
Melting in the depths of my body.

Be not far from me, O Lord*
you are my strength; hasten to help me.

I will tell of your name to my people*
In the midst of the congregation
will I praise you.

They shall come
and make known his salvation,
To a people yet unborn*
Declaring that he, the Lord, has done it.

Scripture

He was in such agony and he prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground. When he returned to his disciples, he found them sleeping from grief.

Luke 22: 44-45

I see him, and he too is alone.

He kneels with his elbows on a rock, and his face turned to the sky. His body looks grey in the moonlight. I have seen him take on the hues and contours of the wilderness. Standing in the mid-day sun, I have gazed at the bronze hills that are sculpted out of the land, and I have seen the shape of his body, vast, one with the earth, stretch out and giving form and meaning to all that is. But now he is carved out of stone, and his body has absorbed the chilled, forsaken spirit of the night.

His breath snags in the air, ragged and dry. He groans, and his voice makes the ground tilt beneath my feet. 'God. Where are you?'

Tina Beattie, 'The Last supper according to Martha and Mary'

*And here he shows the full extent of love
To us whose love is always incomplete
In vain we search the heavens high above,
The God of love is kneeling at our feet.*

Fr. Malcolm Guite, 'Maundy Thursday'

So Judas got a band of soldiers and guards from the chief priests and the Pharisees and went there with lanterns, torches and weapons. Jesus, knowing everything that was going to happen to him, went out and said to the, 'for whom are you looking?'. They answered him, 'Jesus the Nazorean'. He said to them 'I AM'. Judas, his betrayer was also with them. When he said to them, 'I AM', he turned away and fell to the ground.

Depart in silence -

Material in this service is taken from

*Bidding prayers from Common Worship
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'Maundy Thursday' by Malcolm Guite, Word in the Wilderness,
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Prayer by Janet Morley, and responsory prayer on breaking of
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