

## Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12.1-4, (5-10), 11-14

**1 Corinthians 11.23-26, John 13:1-17, 31b-35**

**Let us pray:** Father as we meditate on you Word tonight please send your Holy Spirit into our hearts to minister your words to our lives.  
Amen

I am sure that, like me, you are conscious of how poignant it is to participate in a Maundy Thursday Eucharist on the very anniversary of when Jesus and his disciples celebrated Jesus's last Passover meal. We take a moment now to look back to that evening.

But as we look back we appreciate, in a way the disciples could not, the reason that Jesus said "*This is my body, which is for you.*" For the disciples Good Friday was still a day away, still future, although agonisingly close for Jesus, but gloriously a matter of history for us. Our Maundy Thursday Eucharist brings vividly to our minds remembrance of the crucifixion and all that it means.

And not just the crucifixion, but the Easter Day resurrection too. In the reading from 1 Corinthians Paul writes that *whenever* we celebrate the Lord's Supper we *proclaim the Lord's death until he comes*. W Jesus is alive and will return.

But to whom do we proclaim it? Of course, there may be occasions when there is unbeliever in our midst to whom we proclaim the Lord's death, but I don't think that tonight is one of those occasions.

No, this evening we proclaim the Lord's death to one another, to ourselves.

But what do we proclaim? That a historical figure called Jesus so upset the religious authorities that they had him crucified? Maybe, but, if you think about it, Jesus organised his own death. Just think of his anguish in the garden of Gethsemane as he came to terms with going through with it because it was his Father's will. He had the option of not doing so.

Why did he do it? Why did he go through with it? The reason is in what he said: "*This is my body, which is for you*".

Here is the answer it was “for you”, for me. As Isaiah wrote (53:5 RSV): *“upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.”*

When we proclaim Jesus’s death we proclaim so much more than a historic truth. We proclaim forgiveness, holiness, wholeness and healing of a disjointed relationship with God. We proclaim reconciliation.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians (2 Cor.5:20) *“We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

How is that for the healing of a relationship - from sin to righteousness?

But reconciliation through the death of Jesus is not just about our relationship with God. It is also about our relationship with one another. As Paul writes to the Galatians (3:28): *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

In Luke’s account of the last supper the disciples argue about who is the greatest, demonstrating a degree of division and discord in their relationship.

Paul observed something similar earlier in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor.1:12): *One of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ.”* No wonder Paul and Timothy wrote to them: *We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.*

Because if we are truly reconciled to God then we will also be one with each another in Christ Jesus.

Jesus said to his disciples arguing about who was the greatest *“The greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. ... I am among you as one who serves.”*

Arguing about status and precedence is not a good approach to unity. Causing division is the opposite of reconciliation. But serving one another, taking the lowly place, is a catalyst to it. And that is just what Jesus did when he washed the disciples’ feet.

*John 13:3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God*

When Jesus washed the disciples' feet he was confident of his own status and relationship with God, his Father. And John follows this up with the very little word "so". *So (Jesus) got up from the meal, ... and began to wash his disciples' feet.* It was **because** Jesus knew who he was that he chose to do the lowly task of the household servant and wash the disciples' feet. Even though he was their Lord and Teacher he did not treat the disciples as lower than himself. Instead he chose to serve.

What better way to deal with division, restore relationships and bring reconciliation than by serving? Just think, what if one of the arguing disciples had done it instead of Jesus?!

We take Holy Communion in remembrance of Jesus. In Jewish thought remembrance meant much more than simple recall. It meant to take one's mind back and recapture as much of the reality and significance as possible. Remembrance of a departed person made the deceased present and real again in the lives of those who remembered.

I now have photographs of Brian all over the house. And when I look at them I remember when they were taken, what we were doing and how we felt about it. They make Brian real.

When we take the bread and wine we remember the death on the cross that brought us righteousness, but at the same time we can allow the presence of the living Christ to become alive and real in our experience. We can take the living Lord Jesus into our own selves, feed on him.

When we each do this we essentially do away with our divisions; we all become one in Christ Jesus. We are not only communing with Jesus. We commune with one another.

At St Mungo one of the things we value, along with worshipping together and hearing the Word, is our community together. Our relationships are precious.

When we participate in Holy Communion we proclaim to each other that we are all one in Christ. When I take the bread and wine along with you at the Lord's Table I say to you that I accept you as you are, faults and all, just as Jesus does – or at least that's what I should be saying.

So maybe tonight, when we consider how Jesus set aside his opinion of the disciples, his position as their Lord and Teacher, and served them by doing the job of a lowly servant, we can do the same. Subjugate our differences of opinion, our self-righteousness in the opinions we hold, and instead honour one another and serve one another.

Because we cannot fully be in communion with Jesus if we remain out of communion with each other. We cannot be fully reconciled to God through the bread and wine if we are not reconciled to each other.

That is what the peace is all about in our Communion service. It is about forgiving one another and restoring broken relationships if that is applicable. After all, that was the original intention of the peace: that we reconcile with one another before we take the bread and wine. “Lord unite us in this sign.”

The Lord’s Supper challenges us, proclaims to us, to accept one another, just as Christ accepts us. Do we discriminate? Do we have broken relationships with fellow Christians? If so, let tonight be the time to take the first steps, where it is possible for us to do so, to repair those relationships. Maybe not in person tonight but let it be done by a commitment to pursue reconciliation.

And if there are no areas of relationship breakdown – praise the Lord - let us celebrate the unity that we have; “*we are all one in Christ Jesus*”.