



LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Love One Another 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 & St. John 13:1-15, 31-35

Fr. William Klock

April 2, 2015 — Maundy Thursday

Every Holy Week someone asks what the significance of Maundy Thursday is. Usually it's because of this funny word "Maundy" that we don't use at any other time. "Maundy" is an archaic English word that was taken from the Latin word *mandatum*: "mandate", or more specifically, "commandment". It comes from the Gospel reading for the day. After Jesus washed his disciples' feet and after he'd eaten dinner with them with those strange words over the bread: "This is my body", and over the wine, "This is my blood", he said to them "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another" (John 13:34). Maundy Thursday is "Commandment Thursday"—or, maybe better, *New Commandment Thursday*. And if you think about commandments in biblical terms, it ought to make you think about covenants. Think back to Genesis and to God's covenant with Abraham. He told Abraham, "I will give you a land, make you a great nation, and make you a blessing to the nations and in return you're end of the covenant is to follow me in faith and to be holy." The Lord expanded on that covenant with the Israelites hundreds of years later, but it was still rooted in that original covenant with Abraham. The Lord's Supper and his "new commandment" to love one another are part of a *new*

covenant—one that Paul reminds us is established through his broken body and his shed blood. On Maundy Thursday the two covenants, the old and the new, come together and meet in the person of Jesus.

Think about what Jesus and his disciples were doing in that upper room as they ate dinner. They were celebrating the Passover. But what was the Passover? For that we go back to the book of Exodus. The Israelites had become a great people, but they were living in bondage as slaves in Egypt. They cried out to the Lord. Surely this is not what he had promised to Abraham! And the Lord heard. He sent Moses to lead his people in an exodus from their bondage to Egypt. Pharaoh refused the Lord's command, given through Moses, to let his people go. Nine plagues ravaged Egypt, showing the Lord's power. Still Pharaoh refused. And so the Lord sent a tenth plague. He sent an angel to travel through Egypt one night and that angel took the life of every firstborn son—from the lowliest slave family to the royal family of Pharaoh. It was an awful act of judgement.

But before the Angel of Death passed through Egypt, the Lord instructed his people through Moses: I'm going to set you free. Each family is to sacrifice a lamb without blemish. You are to paint the blood on the doorposts of your home and you are to eat the lamb. When the angel comes and sees the blood on your doorposts he will pass over and spare your firstborn.

That was precisely what happened. The angel of death passed through Egypt, the Israelites who had painted the lamb's blood on their doorposts were spared, but the

angel killed all the firstborn of Egypt. In his anguish, Pharaoh finally set the Israelites free. Moses led them in an exodus from their Egyptian bondage. Of course, that wasn't the end of it. We all know how Pharaoh again changed his mind. He went after the Israelites with his army and cornered them at the Red Sea, which the Lord then miraculously opened so that they could cross to safety on dry land. When the Egyptians tried to follow, the Lord caused the waters to flow back into place, drowning the Egyptians.

The Lord continued to lead his people, as a pillar of cloud by day and as a pillar of fire by night. He fed them on manna in the wilderness. At Mt. Sinai he met them and gave them his law so that they would know how to keep their end of the covenant—how to be his covenant people.

And so every year, as the Jews celebrated the Passover—as they sacrificed the lamb, painted its blood on their doorposts, and ate it with unleavened bread, that meal served as a reminder of their identity and of their covenant status with the Lord. It was a source of identity. It was a source of assurance. You can imagine why the Lord was so offended by his people when they celebrated the Passover each year and took assurance from it that they were in his good graces, all the while ignoring their covenant obligations to justice and mercy and to be a light to the gentiles.

But as we've seen in our study of St. Luke's gospel, Jesus came to "fix" all of that. He came to be the Son of Man—that figure from Daniel's prophecy who represents Israel. Jesus came to do what

Israel had failed to do. He came to fulfil the law as Israel never had. He also came as Isaiah's suffering servant who gives his life for his people—the one who knew no sin, yet who took his people's sins on himself for their redemption. Both of these in addition to his coming as the Son of David—the great King—which we celebrated and recalled, waving our palm this past Sunday. All of these aspects of Jesus' person and ministry come together in Holy Week.

Again, think back to that first "Maundy Thursday". Jesus and his disciples were there in the upper room eating the Passover—recalling who they were as the Lord's people, recalling that great exodus from their Egyptian bondage, and celebrating the Lord's covenant. And yet, as the gospel writers tell the story, we realise that it wasn't quite the usual Passover. Passover was the following Day: Friday, not Thursday. This has caused some people to question whether Jesus and his friends were eating a Passover meal or not—or it's caused them to question the timeline of these events, suggesting that Jesus was crucified on Saturday and some even going to far as to argue that Jesus rose on Monday. But they miss the point. The gospel writers are clear that Jesus was celebrating the Passover. The bread, the wine, the closing "hymn", not to mention the significance of everything Jesus does in the context of this meal all make it clear that it was a Passover meal. They were simply celebrating a day early. Now *that* was a little odd and the disciples were probably wondering why Jesus chose to do that. It makes sense, however, if we remember

that Jesus knew he was about to die. It especially makes sense when we realise that Passover lambs were slaughtered on Friday. That means that Jesus and his friends were celebrating the Passover without a lamb. That was odd, but not unheard of. During the exile, when there was no temple, the people celebrated Passover without lambs. And ever since the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70 Jews have celebrated the Passover without lambs.

For Jesus to celebrate the Passover without a lamb was something of a prophetic act. Jesus was indicating that he was himself to be the Passover lamb. Jesus points to this as he takes the bread and says, "This is my body, broken for you." The great rabbi Gamaliel, who lived at the same time as Jesus, taught that the unleavened bread of the Passover signified Israel's redemption from Egypt.¹ Jesus' words, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood", take us back to the first exodus and to the Lord establishing his covenant with his people. We read there, "And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words'" (Exodus 24:8). In Zechariah 9 the blood of the covenant is connected with Zion's rejoicing as her king comes "triumphant and victorious...humble and riding on a donkey" (9:9).

Jesus is leading his people on a new exodus. As we've seen, again in our study of Luke's gospel,

¹ mPes. 10.5, cited in N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), p. 560.

Israel had failed at her end of the covenant. She was in the land God had promised, but still living in exile. Pagans ruled her. The temple had been rebuilt, but the presence of the Lord was long gone. She was in bondage. And so Jesus has come to lead his people out of their bondage—not out of the bondage of Egypt or of Rome, but this time from the bondage of sin and death. He has come to fulfill the law as Israel never could. And he has come to offer himself as a once-and-for-all Passover lamb for the sins of his people that death might forever pass them over.

Just as the Lord established a people for himself through that first Passover, he established a new people for himself through this second Passover, as Jesus gave his life for the sake of his people. Think about that as we come to the Lord's Table. This is our Passover. Just as the yearly Passover reminded Israel of her exodus from Egypt, marked her as the Lord's covenant people, and gave her assurance of his promises, so the Lord's Supper is our Passover. Here at his Table he reminds us that he gave his life for our sake; here he reminds us that he had led us in an exodus from our bondage to sin and death; here he reminds us that we are his people and he gives us assurance of his grace. When we come here in faith, we effectively paint the blood of the lamb on our doorposts, that death might pass us over. The price—the wages of sin—has been paid in full by Jesus.

But, brothers and sisters, it's important that we remember that there are two parties to every covenant. Israel stood condemned

when she celebrated the Passover. She offered the lamb and painted the blood on her doorposts in assurance of God's grace, but she failed to live the law God had given to her as her part of the covenant. Let us not come to the Lord's Table with that sort of presumption. When he instituted this new Passover that first Maundy Thursday, Jesus gave his disciples their end of the covenant: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

As if it wasn't enough that he would offer his own life for the sins of his people, Jesus prepared them by kneeling to wash their dirty feet. He took on himself the role of a servant in order to show us what it looks like to love one another as he has loved us. Think about that: God washing the feet of his people. God giving his life for his people. And not just his people, but his rebellious people—his treasonous people. And then he tells us to love one another as he has loved us. St. Paul brings it all together very profoundly in Philippians 2:5-8: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Brothers and sisters, this is the mind of Christ. Is it our mind too? Let us never come to the Table for the sole purpose of receiving assurance of God's love for us in

Jesus, but let us come also to strengthened by Jesus that we might love others as he has loved us.