

Matthew 26:26-29 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.'

²⁷ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood of the^[a] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'

Friends, I must start with a confession: you see, although I am a "cradle Methodist," my mum taking me – sometimes begrudgingly to Chapel – from my earliest memories, Maundy Thursday didn't mean, too much to me, when I was growing up. In fact, it was something that happened outside of my Christian experience. Now, I was aware, that it had, something, to do with foot washing, well at least the gospel passage did – we will think about that in a moment -, but the primary focus, always seemed to be, the sharing of bread and wine, Holy Communion.

And then, when I was part of the house church movement in Sheffield, Maundy Thursday and its remembrance, was not in any way, a significant part, of the practice, of the church.

Now, all of this, changed for me, when I came into circuit ministry, some 25 years ago, and I encountered, more liturgically inclined, church families.

So firstly some basics, Friends if you look to the Synoptics, that is Matthew 26, Mark 14 and Luke 22, you will find the preparation for the Passover, and the institution of the Lord's supper, but, BUT, there is no mention, of Jesus washing the disciples feet. Then, if we look to John 13, we will find the Passover meal, and Jesus washing the disciple's feet, but no words as such instituting the Last Supper, Holy Communion, as we know it.

My friends, as we as we continue, our journey through Holy Week, the last week, in the life of our Lord, we recognise, that one-third, of all the events that, we have, about Jesus' life, occurred during this week: Consequently, this reminds us, of the immense significance, of these last days.

And so firstly, some thoughts on the Passover meal.

Now, in many ways, God breaks in, to the normality of life, as the disciples, Jews to a man, gather for the Passover meal, something they have done, from their earliest memories. Here they have gathered in a home, whose, we are not sure, but we do know, that it had a furnished, second floor.

As they gather, they participate in, what is called, a Seder meal, one of the highlights, of the Passover week. The Passover festival, of course, had been done, for centuries, before Jesus came, on the scene. It commemorated, that time, when the Jews, were in bondage, in Egypt. Moses warned Pharaoh, to let his people go, but Pharaoh, hardened his heart. So God, sent a death, over the land of Egypt, but miraculously this death, passed over, the homes of the Jews. The result being, that the season of Passover, was given birth.

Now, the meal itself was a symbolic one, reminding the Jews, of the sufferings, of their forefathers, and the power, of God's deliverance. The foods, that were eaten, were symbols, to remind the Jews, of their captivity, in Egypt. Apple sauce, was eaten, to remind them, of brick mortar, and the fact, that they were forced, to make bricks, with no straw. A bitter herb, is eaten, to remind them, of the bitterness, of their captivity. It was this, symbolic, Seder Meal, that the disciples, were taking part in, that night, in the upper room.

And then, THEN, at the conclusion, of that meal, that Jesus himself, added two more symbols. He took a loaf, and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take eat, this is my body which is broken for you, do this in remembrance of me. Then he took a cup with wine. He drank from it and gave it to his disciples saying, Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood, of the covenant, which is poured out, for many, for the forgiveness of sins. And so, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, was born out of the experience, of an ancient, Jewish custom.

My friends, my hope is, that in this Holy week, God may break in, to the normality, of our lives. For although, we may be unable, to share in bread and wine, together, in church, perhaps, we should take on, the practice, of the Salvation Army, who see every meal, as a holy Meal, a meal, where we remember, and give thanks, to God for, His love, His provision, in our lives.

And Secondly some thoughts, on Jesus washing the disciple's feet.

Firstly : Foot washing, is an act of humility.

I must confess, I have both read, and heard people, describe Jesus washing the disciples' feet in the gospel of John, as transgressive, and rather icky, because feet 2000 years ago, were so dirty, for in those days, well, people, usually walked everywhere, in sandaled feet. The consequence being, that it was, only servants, who would suffer, the indignity, of feet washing.

Secondly : Foot washing, is an act of intimacy.

Now many of us, hide our feet away, in shoes, don't we. In the summer we may be, brave enough, to put some sandals on, with socks or not, as the case may be. And again, for those of us, like myself, who visit the chiropodist, well, we think of our feet, as ours, and not something, we want to display, to anyone else. But here in John, Jesus washes the disciple's feet, NO excuses, NO exceptions.

Now I guess, for many of us, this act, or even the thought of, is still likely, to make us, feel uncomfortable. And yet, this is part, of the beauty, of the act. For in a world, that so often, demands the body beautiful, even perfection, the act, of someone seeing, our impurities — our sweaty, stinky feet — and touching us, still, is of such immense significance, and—something that Jesus did for His friends. And, perhaps, just perhaps, when we are able to meet again, we will allow such intimacy, such loving service to occur, accepting each other, just as we are.

Thirdly : Foot washing, can transform society.

For me, there is a dominant narrative, in much of our world today, not least our own, where who we are, as individuals, is more important, than who we are, together, as a community. At its best, our church, in its life and practice, offer a counter-narrative, to this assumption. In that we choose to serve Christ, as we serve each other. For what do the words of the popular hymn say: **Brother, sister, let me serve you, Let me be as Christ to you; Pray that I may have the grace to. Let you be my servant, too.**

In John Chapter 13 and verse 15 Jesus said : For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Now, I cannot wash my own feet; I must wait for someone else, to do so for me, and so I must allow, someone, to touch my feet, even mine.

Finally, as Jesus humbled himself, and washed, the feet of those in that room 2000 years, ago, we are, to do the same, as we humble ourselves, and allow our own feet to be washed. We must all serve and *be served*.

Of course, where we are, in our own personal, faith journey, will land us in, wholly different, places on this; but, BUT, at the very least, I hope that the power, of this act, by our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, shines through, this Holy Week, as opposed, to being offered, as the prologue, the preamble, to the Last Supper.

My Friends, my hope is, that we will, open ourselves up, in this holiest of weeks, to the transforming love of Christ, and that in days to come, we will humble enough, gracious enough, to be servants of the servant, as we choose to live, to Christ's Praise and Glory.

Amen.

Well, Thank You for listening. Hope to see again, on Friday,
But for now, may the blessing and peace of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you, and those you love,
this day and always Amen.