



Maundy Thursday Reflection - 9th April 2020 Transcript

Today is Maundy Thursday, a day when we remember the events of that particular Thursday long ago, a day when we share communion together, as we remember how Jesus came together with his disciples and shared bread and wine with them, as a way of explaining all that was happening and then said, "do this in remembrance of me". The church has been sharing communion ever since, on a very regular basis. We can't do that today, but the day will come when we can share in that way once more.

Meanwhile - today we remember that hardest evening, the evening of sadness and betrayal, of anxiety and of uncertainty, that evening of saying goodbye to all that was passed and sharing together on the edge of a new journey that none of them could yet understand. That evening Jesus met together with his disciples in a secret place. It wasn't just about preparing for the journey ahead. It was also about remembering where they had come from.

And tonight for us is about remembering not only a moment in history, but where we have come from and where we are going as Christians. We too are in a place of anxiety and uncertainty. And we too need to be reminded that God is making a way through this for us. The journey ahead won't be an easy journey, any more than the way through which we have already come has ever been easy. But it will be a journey in which God in Christ will share, through his Spirit constantly beside us.

And so I would like us to pray together, using some of the elements of the passover meal, the food that Jesus shared with his disciples, as inspiration for our thoughts and prayers. The passover meal is a celebration of the journey of the children of Israel from slavery to freedom, as they were led out of Egypt by Moses and God, more than a thousand years before the time of Jesus. We can't share in the actual food, any more than we can share in each others' company, face to face. But we are together in Christ in a very real way, on this evening of anxiety and uncertainty.

The meal would have included unleavened bread, because the bread of the ancient Israelites was unleavened. There was no time to wait for the yeast to rise and so they settled for a poor sort of alternative, called matzo, also known as the bread of haste, before they set off on their journey out of slavery and into freedom. They didn't know where that journey would take them. We never know where our journey will take us, but we can look back and see the journey we have been on to this point and know that God was with us. This bread is very dry, like a cream cracker. Imagine its texture in your mouth. And think of the

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journey through life that you have experienced in the past year.

God has been part of that journey. Can you see where his presence has been apparent to you? And he is on the journey ahead for us, through these days of remembering and celebrating, and through these unsettling times in our lives, through whatever lies ahead. Let's commit our journey ahead to God, recognising that he can supply us with food for the journey, and he is ready to walk with us, ready to walk with us as a community of believers, wherever the path takes us.

Lord we know that you that we share our journey of life with you. And we thank you that you sat down to share with your disciples that night before you died to make sure they understood that their path ahead would be with you. In this day of darkness and hiding, of mystery and hidden truths, may we find assurance in your presence and in your words of hope. Amen

The meat of the ancient Israelites was lamb, lamb which remembers sacrifice. The lamb that they ate was killed sacrificially, and its blood was a symbol of protection. The meat was eaten to give strength for the journey. Imagine a plate of roasted lamb, and as you do so we remember those who currently feel enslaved in any way, enslaved because of the pressures they are currently facing, enslaved by their work or enslaved through lack of work. We remember those enslaved in loneliness or isolation, those enslaved by fear and anxiety, for themselves or their loved ones, those enslaved by emotions they cannot express, or communicate. And in these uncertain times for us all, we continue to remember those enslaved by poverty, by long-term unemployment, by illness, by pain.

Lord we think about the lamb of the ancient Israelites, and give thanks that you came to save us from all that enslaves us. And that you came to save all who know enslavement of any kind. We acknowledge the things that imprison us. Your blood was shed for our protection, for all eternity. You gave yourself that all may know freedom and security in being loved and saved. This day when we remember that safety was and is fragile and security was and is fleeting. May we open ourselves to the hope and release that you bought for us, and may we be ready and willing to point this world to the hope and freedom found in you. Amen

On the table would be a bowl of salted water, into which something like celery or parsley would be dipped. The ancient Israelites knew real pain and real tears, in their life of enslavement. The salted water reminds us of the tears that were shed, for the misery and struggle of human life. For the ancient Israelites they left behind a life of tears and suffering, and went into a new freedom, with the sweetness of fresh hope. Imagine the taste of salted water. As you think about that, let's together confess our frequent failure to accept the hope of freedom

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that you offer.

Lord in the midst of the tears of human life there is the sweetness of hope, and that hope is found in you. The disciples experienced that night of goodbyes, but the tears they would shed were yet to come: tears of loss and grief, tears of fear and hopelessness. But it is you in the midst of us who can dry our tears and who can transform our hopelessness. On the brink of your own suffering, you offer amazing love, and a stillness that is peace itself. We offer to you our own confession for all that we put between you and ourselves. And we repent of all that separates us from you. Draw us closer to yourself and may we know the sweetness of your presence. We are transformed when we repent and accept the saving grace of Christ. Amen

On the table would be some grains of wheat, as a symbol of the early grain harvest which coincides with the time of passover. The wheat symbolises their gift of thanksgiving, and their commitment to God's purposes. Imagine your hand in a bowl of wheat grains: imagine the texture as they flow through your fingers.

As you do so, offer yourself to God, to serve in whatever way God is calling you to serve, remembering the whole-hearted, life-giving commitment, that Jesus has for you and for all people.

Lord, a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies to self, in order to bring forth the harvest. In order for new life to come to this world, Jesus had to die. We commit ourselves to your purposes. We invite you to bring new life in us, may we die to self - and be drawn into new life in you. Equip us for the work you are calling us to do. Amen.

There might have been a plate of olives on the table. The olive grows freely all over Jesus's home land, and shortly after the meal that he shared with his disciples, he left the safety of that secret place, and went out into the night, to a place where olives grew. There in the olive grove he asked those who followed him to stay alert while he prayed. They failed. We are often not alert for things Jesus is calling us to do but his patience is endless. Olives, full of oil, represent the oil of gladness, in our willingness to serve. We know that we will often fail. Jesus asked for the cup to be taken from him, but he accepted it and went all the way for us. In the olives, we express our gladness in sharing in God's purposes.

Lord, on this night when we see Jesus preparing to die for us, and embracing all that you have laid upon him on our behalf, we are glad to acknowledge that we have a part to play in this too: to receive from you, and to give for you. We offer our gratitude for all that this night means, for all that followed it, and for our salvation, our freedom, our hope. And we commit ourselves to your purposes here and now, in the name of Jesus and by the power of his Spirit. Amen.



Let's share together in the Lord's prayer

Our Father, who 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 those 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

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

Those words appear in Luke chapter 22, verses 19 and 20. The events of that evening are all recorded in Luke 22. Why not read them to yourself.

Stay with those events, on that night long ago, and continue in prayer.

There is no formal ending - because what happened on that Thursday long ago was just the beginning of a night of events. And what was started that night goes on and on, endlessly. We've been at this place before, but although we remember it each year, we do so each year from a new point on our own journey.

When you leave, go in peace, knowing that Jesus walks from this place with you, and will be your companion now and for ever, and that everything is possible because of what he went through on that long dark evening, and in the long dark day ahead. And he went there willingly. And because of that, there is hope and peace and freedom and salvation.