

Exodus 12: 1-4, 11-24  
1 Corinthians 11: 23-26  
John 13: 1-17, 31b-35  
Psalm 116:1, 10-17

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Year C

## Maundy Thursday

May the words of my heart and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to thee, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer, Amen.

A few years ago one morning while writing in my journal, these words came to me, unbidden. "Center your heart on the feast of Jesus." Those same words come back to me tonight as once again, we center our hearts on the feast of Jesus on the night before he died.

"Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you..." 2,000 years later these words are the refrain of our souls, the Eucharistic feast, the beating heart of our faith. It is in it and through it we know and continually unite our souls to Jesus and tap into the wellspring of his love which never runs dry. We receive it in remembrance "that Christ died for us," remembering that this ritual, as simple as it is profound, was his gift to us on the final night of his life when he had only hours left to live.

It could have been otherwise. Why not more dramatic finale of miracles, or parables, or preaching? Jesus chose none of that. He chose to have dinner, for the last time, with his friends, on who whom he staked the future of his ministry; his cherished disciples who in his final hours loved him, betrayed him, denied him, abandoned him and wept for him.

Midway through the dinner Jesus stood up and with a towel wrapped around his waist, washed their feet. Imagine. Foot washing in the first century was not uncommon when a guest arrived in a home, but it was always done by the lowliest servant, the least of these. So it would be shocking to his closest followers when Jesus kneels before them washing the dirt and grime off their feet. Shocking and astounding.

We understand now what they could not fully comprehend. This was how they were to go into the world as Christ's followers, with humility and service.

Take, eat, this is my body and blood poured out for you.... Jesus, in his final hours could only think of generosity. Of pouring out his soul in the sacrifice of his body.

Like the expensive perfume poured out of the alabaster jar that Mary massaged into his feet a week prior, Jesus gave us something even more priceless in the simple gifts of bread and wine—he gave us the gifts of his never-failing love.

“Center your heart on the feast of Jesus.” The Eucharist feast, yes, and the extravagance of Christ’s love, which was poured out for us and into us. We were given everything we need and we resurrect him every time we open our hands and our hearts to receive him. It is we who carry him into the world. Every single time, if we choose to “become what we receive.”

My life changed subtly, though dramatically, at a Eucharist in Westminster Abbey years ago during one of the darkest times in my life when the God I wasn’t looking for found me.

And the gift I received that day at noon, continued to unfold gradually in the decades ahead, especially when I prayed at the Eucharist, “Let thy will be my will,” a most dangerous prayer because it has the power to lead you, as it did me, to a place beyond imagining.

But there are no shortcuts. We can trust in the power of the resurrection, knowing what the disciples did not, that Easter always comes.

And yet, we are no different from the disciples in that we can be sabotaged by fears, by betrayal and abandonment. We can stare through a dark glass seemingly endlessly, wondering when, if ever, we might ever see face-to-face, as we live through the crucifixions in our own lives, which surely come.

And when we stand at the foot of the cross in our own lives, the gift we are given in the feast of Jesus is his abiding love that never abandons us if we continually open our hearts to it.

And all he asks is that we let that love pour forth from us, too. “I give you a new commandment. Love one another as I have loved you.” Maundy is the Latin word for commandment, and Jesus staked his life on this: that we will love with a generosity that knows no bounds. That we will push past the abandonments, the

betrayals, the despair and defeats in our lives, knowing that they are never the end. We, as Jesus' followers are called to make him known to the world through our love.

I once brought communion to a young man at the hospital who had been denied it in his own church because he could not speak or write. As his disease progressed, he could no longer walk, and did not need words to communicate. He clearly understood almost everything but grew up attending services in a church where he was never allowed to be confirmed or receive the Eucharist.

Hospitalized in the final months before he died, I offered to bring communion to him and his mother.

Really? She had given up on thinking this might be possible and was momentarily speechless.

When the moment came, his mother placed a tiny sliver of wafer in his mouth that had been dipped in wine. Because I was unsure of how comfortable he was with touch, I made the sign of the cross over his forehead as I said a final prayer.

He grabbed my wrist and smashed it to his forehead.

“He knows Jesus,” his mother said. “He knows.”

And again, so did I know in an immediate and visceral way that Jesus is always within reach when we center our hearts on his Eucharistic feast.

AMEN