

Maundy Thursday: A Feast of Love



Though we are separated in body, nothing can separate us from God's love through which we are one Body in Christ.

Before You Begin

- Read through this order of service ahead of time.
- With family: assign different reading parts to different people. The text has been divided into 4 voices -- assign these to work for your family.
- Alone: read as much as you can aloud to be reminded that God speaks to and through you.

Preparation Suggestions

- Prepare a meal to share with the other people in your home.
- Find some music to listen to, if that is meaningful to you. Some ideas include:
 - Idina Menzel – At This Table <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=acRAIkV7QDc>
 - Sidewalk Prophets – Come to the Table <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umjG9mVGI5o>
 - The Highwomen – Crowded Table https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubNY-CPAp_I&feature=youtu.be
 - Antonio Vivaldi – Stabat Mater https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQpWwMkGtj4&feature=emb_logo
 - Maundy Thursday Tenebrae Palestrina <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liu0kdsPG-s>
 - Taize Selections <https://blueeyedennis-siempre.blogspot.com/2011/04/holy-week-music-taize.html>
- Set out a basin and pitcher of warm water (or use a sink), soap and a couple of hand towels
- Set your table with dishes, food, a Bible, a cross or icon, photographs or papers with the names of those not with you. Light a candle.
- Be sure to include bread or a stand-in and some sort of beverage (water is fine).
- Gather wherever you will wash your hands.

Background Adapted by T. Dale-Ferguson from Liturgy by G. Sparkes, Gifts in Open Hands
“Agape meals were part of the worshipping life of the early church. They took up the banquet imagery present in a number of Jesus’ parables. They were occasions of joy and festivity as the community celebrated the gift of life through Christ [and lived into the promise of God’s Beloved Community]. Agape meals also served as boundary markers, enabling the community to affirm

its identity as the body of Christ, and they were places of economic justice, enabling a sharing and redistribution amongst the community.” (Graham Sparkes, Gifts in Open Hands)

Today we gather at many tables in many homes to remember that meal so long ago when Jesus gathered with his dearest friends, his disciples. We remember the wilderness around us: physical separation, quarantine, illness, unemployment, deployment of health care workers, fear, uncertainty and grief. We also remember the wilderness to come for Jesus: betrayal, denial by his closest friends, suffering and death.

Let us seek God’s nourishment, strength and hope to face the wilderness.

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Plain text is spoken by one voice. Bold indicates the response of all voices. Italics offers instruction.

A Ritual of Washing

Gather at the sink or water basin with soap and a towel close by.

Telling The Story A Selection from John 13

Voice 1: It was the day before the Passover festival. Jesus and his disciples were sharing the evening meal. Jesus got up from the table, took off his robes, and tied a towel around his waist. Then Jesus poured water into a washbasin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and dry them with the towel he was wearing.

Voice 2: Jesus came to Simon Peter, who said to him:

All: Are you going to wash my feet, Lord?

Voice 2: Jesus answered Peter:

All: “You do not understand now what I am doing, but you will understand later.”

Voice 2: Peter declared:

All: Never at any time will you wash my feet!

Voice 2: Jesus answered:

All: If I do not wash your feet, you will no longer be my disciple.

Voice 2: Simon Peter answered:

All: Lord, not only my feet, then, but my hands and head, too!

Voice 3: Jesus said: “Those who have bathed are completely clean and do not need to wash other than their feet.” After washing their feet, Jesus put his robes back on, returned to his place at the table, and said, “Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you speak correctly, because I am. If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you too must wash each other’s feet. I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you.”

A Ritual of Hand-Washing

Depending on your home/family context, this ritual may be somber or joyful, serious and gentle or playful. There is no wrong way to do this. God meets us where we are.

All: Water has always been a sign of creation, life, birth and rebirth.

Voice 4: We remember the water of baptism, a symbol of our dying and rising in

Christ. Tonight, at Christ's invitation, we share this water of service and love.

All: With this water let us bless one another and wash each other's hands.

Take turns washing and drying one another's hands. You may use soap or simply water. As you wash another person's hands (or your own if you are by yourself), say: May this water renew and restore your spirit. Then gently dry one another's hands saying: May you dwell in God's tender care.

Gathering at the Table

After finishing the ritual of washing, gather at the table.

Voice 4: Tonight, we remember the last night Jesus spent with his disciples celebrating the Passover meal. We remember that the early church would gather for Agape meals or love feasts to remember Jesus' life and ministry, to affirm their communal identity as the body of Christ, and to share food and resources so everyone would have enough.

Voice 1: Our worship centers around a meal. First, we will share bread, then we will eat our meal together and finally we will hear the story of Jesus' last meal with his disciples. We will close our worship by sharing the cup of blessing.

Voice 2: This table is for all who are hungry. If you are hungry, come.

All: Where compassion and love are, there is God.

Voice 2: The love of Christ has gathered us as one. Let us love one another.

All: Where compassion and love are, there is God.

Voice 2: When we are gathered in spirit, even distance cannot separate us. Christ is present in our midst.

All: Where compassion and love are, there is God.

Voice 2: In this meal and worship, may we feel the joy that is community, the peace that is Christ and the presence that is Spirit. Amen.

Breaking the Bread of Life

Voice 3: Here we are at a table. We come hungry -- for food and drink, for company and conversation, for God's Spirit of hope, comfort, and peace for our wilderness journey.

Jesus gathered around tables like this one. He gathered with sinners and saints, religious leaders and tax collectors, the proud and arrogant, the self-deprecating and uncertain, the filthy rich and destitute, the healthy and sick, the young and old. We remember the last meal that Jesus shared with his disciples -- a meal remembering God's liberating power. At that meal, Jesus took a loaf of bread, broke it and shared it with his disciples saying, "Take and eat, this is my body broken for you. Do this and remember me."

All: Holy God, for the food before us, for the community surrounding us and the love around and within us, we say thank you! Amen

You are invited to serve one another bread saying simply: "The body of Christ"

After sharing the bread, enjoy your meal!

Instead of asking for what you want, look around. See what others need.

Offer that to them. Attend to those around you and trust that they will attend to you.

Table Conversation: As it makes sense in your setting, share:

How you have seen and experienced community these last few weeks? Has anything surprised you? How have you maintained, strengthened and created community. What have you learned?

Music: Music ideas listed above in the Preparation Suggestions

Telling The Story: John 13:1-3, 21-34

After about 15 minutes, have someone read the following scripture.

Before the Festival of Passover, Jesus knew that his time had come to leave this world and go to God. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them fully.

Jesus and his disciples were sharing the evening meal. The devil had already provoked Judas, Simon Iscariot's son, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew God had given everything into his hands and that he had come from God and was returning to God. After he said these things, Jesus was deeply disturbed and testified, "I assure you, one of you will betray me." His disciples looked at each other, confused about which of them he was talking about. One of the disciples, the one whom Jesus loved, was at Jesus' side. Simon Peter nodded at him to get him to ask Jesus who he was talking about. Leaning back toward Jesus, this disciple asked, "Lord, who is it?"

Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread once I have dipped into the bowl." Then he dipped the piece of bread and gave it to Judas, Simon Iscariot's son. After Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus told him, "What you are about to do, do quickly."

No one sitting at the table understood why Jesus said this to him. Some thought that, since Judas kept the money bag, Jesus told him, "Go, buy what we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor. So when Judas took the bread, he left immediately. And it was night.

When Judas was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Human One has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify the Human One in himself and will glorify him immediately. Little children, I'm with you for a little while longer. You will look for me—but, just as I told the religious leaders, I also tell you now—'Where I am going, you cannot come.' 'I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other.'"

All: May God open our hearts to hear the good news.

Sharing the Cup of Grace

Make sure you have something in your glass -- water, wine, juice, tea.

Voice 1: Like Jesus' disciples, we have broken bread together. We have heard of the betrayal and suffering to come in the days ahead. We remember that at the end of the meal, Jesus took their common cup, and giving thanks for it, he shared it with them saying: "Take and drink -- this is the cup of the new covenant poured out in my blood for the forgiveness of sins. Do this and remember me." Everyone is invited to drink.

All: We are God's people.

Shaped and formed by water and Word.

Sustained and nourished by the gift of Love.

Together, we will live as God's people.

Benediction

Voice 1: We must not stay here.

Voice 2: As we journey with Jesus to the cross, our purpose is among those who repent, those who open their hearts and change their lives to cultivate peace and sow justice.

Voice 3: As we look to the cross, as we feel the wilderness closing in around us,

Voice 4: We trust in God, who promises to fill the void of shadow with light and the emptiness of death with life.

All: Let us leave this time with trembling hearts, to receive and sow the seeds of God's beloved community.

This liturgy is shared by Maren Tirabassi on her blog [Gifts-in-Open-Hands](#). I have chosen to offer this to you all, as I am part of the writing community that has contributed to several books of prayers and worship resources that Maren has edited.

Maren writes: Shared with me by [A Child Laughs -- Prayers of Justice and Hope](#) contributor, and pastor of First Congregational Church, UCC Loveland, Colorado, Thandiwe A. Dale-Ferguson is this service, based on an in-person service that he led last year but helpful for those still looking for a template for Maundy Thursday. She gives full permission for the use of the service (and I give permission for all that is adapted from [Gifts in Open Hands](#).)