

Maundy Thursday Sermon 2021

Good evening everybody, on this Maundy Thursday, the day before Good Friday. For this short talk this evening I would like revisit the scene of that first Maundy Thursday when Jesus had the Passover Meal with his disciples. You will remember the events leading up to the Passover Meal. Jesus had sent Peter and John into the city to ‘Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.’ And when they asked Jesus ‘where do you want us to prepare for it?’ he replied,

“As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and there you will find a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there.”¹³ They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. (Luke 22:10-13)

So Jesus was aware that it was his farewell meal with his disciples. And what a final meal it was. At that meal Jesus laid down two imperatives for the Christian Life.

The first was to remember his death on the cross. How did he do this? And he did this by using two everyday objects common in Hebrew life. He chose the peasants loaf and the lowly grape. In our Gospel account it says that,

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 which is given for you, do this in remembrance of me.” Then he took the cup of wine and having given thanks he gave it to them saying, “Drink this, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this as oft as ye shall drink it in remembrance of me.’ (Luke 22:19-20, Matt. 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24)

And to this day, the followers of Jesus obey that instruction. These are the words to our communion liturgy.

Now we may call it different names. Finchampstead Baptist Centre may call the Lord’s Supper, the Catholics the Mass, and the Anglican’s the Eucharist or Holy Communion. And I have to say I find all of these names helpful as each one of them convey something about the special occasion of that first breaking of the bread and drinking of the cup.

It is the Lord’s Supper because it commemorates the Passover meal Jesus ate with his disciples. That time when the Israelites lives were spared by God when the Angel of Death passed over by marking their doors with the Blood of the Lamb. It is the Eucharist or Act of thanksgiving because we are thankful for the grace or *charis* that God has shown to us, and the continued work of the Holy Spirit in us. For most of us Anglican’s we call it Holy Communion. It is Communion because through it we commune with God and with other believers in this memorial service. And so in every Service of Holy Communion as we eat the bread and drink the wine, we should remember *all* that God has done through us by his Son.

For the disciples, only did the true significance of this memorial come to bear once Jesus had died and rose again. The breaking of the bread was of course his body on the cross and the drinking of the wine was the blood that he shed for us, for a sinful humanity. And so the tearing of the peasant’s loaf and the crushing of the humble grape were **symbols** of the type of death that he was to suffer, for us. He was to die for our redemption.

And just as Jesus reminded his disciples two thousand years ago not to forget his death on the cross, he is reminding us today. The breaking of the bread and the drinking from the cup of salvation was the one act that Jesus **insisted** that we remember him by. Never does Jesus ask us to remember his birth. Never did he ask for any of his wonderful miracles to be immortalised. And this is telling isn’t it? Never does he want us to forget what he accomplished on the Cross that first Good Friday. By taking away the sins of the world he was re-establishing a severed relationship. By redeeming the World he was restoring our relationship with God our Father, and each other. And this is why our LORD asks us to never forget the work his Son accomplished on the cross.

Julian McAllen

So that was the first of two instructions that Jesus gave to his disciples in his farewell meal in the upper room. But what was the other instruction that Jesus gave that day? We heard it in our Gospel reading from Barbara.

‘A new commandment I give you, that you love one another as I have loved you’ (John 13:34) And how did he demonstrate it to his disciples during the Last Supper? What did he do?

The Lord rose up from the table. He began to wash the disciple’s feet. A job that was allotted for the servants. The lowest members of the household. It was the servants job to wash the feet of the guests. But Jesus, the Rabbi, or Rabboni, the Great Teacher of his disciples, was insistent that HE wash their feet. But this is too much for Peter and he remonstrates with the Lord. ‘No Lord!’ he says. ‘I am not going to let you stoop so low’. But Jesus admonishes Peter for refusing to be washed by His Lord and Master.

What does Jesus say? ‘Peter! Unless I wash you, you have no share in me.’ What does that mean? Not only does this mean that Peter’s sins had to be washed by Jesus but that Peter had to learn the hard lesson of servanthood. It was a humbling experience for Peter and the disciples - but it is an integral part of being a follower of Jesus. An integral part of the Christian life is that we take on a servant heart.

Now the disciples should have been aware of this call to servanthood much earlier. Our Lord had demonstrated servanthood all the time he had been with the disciples. But they still had a lot to learn. They were still early on in their faith journey with Jesus. Jesus had said to the disciples,

‘Whoever among you wants to be great must become the servant of you all, and if he wants to be first among you he must be your slave—just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.’ (Matt. 20.26)

Wouldn’t be wonderful if people in all walks of life demonstrated this virtue. With their workforces, the contracts and pension benefits that they offer to the lowest of their employees. We do see glimpses of it with the great philanthropists of the 19th Century and indeed even now. But only a few.

I have to say in my own life, being almost 50 and having two young children I am beginning to realise what servanthood is, and this is only in the realm of the family. I don’t know whether you are like me, but a life of service is not easy. And if you are feeling tired please be encouraged by our Lord and not daunted by a life of service. We know that our Lord got tired, that he had to take a break, and find a lonely spot. And he did the same with his disciples.

But he did also say that, ‘It is more blessed to give than receive.’ We all receive at times in our lives. I know in my own life that there are people who have given me so much, and I am not talking about my parents. I have been on the receiving end of some great acts of kindness and to those people I am eternally grateful. These were people who helped me when I was at my lowest ebb. But there is an emphasis here by our Lord when he says it is more blessed to give than to receive. There is a great peace, I can only describe it as pleasing to God, that comes from helping others rather than helping ourselves. Our attitude should be towards giving away rather than hoarding up. The Lord reminds us that, ‘Our God shall provide all our needs’ (Isaiah 58:11) so we should not store up things here on earth (taking), but rather in heaven (giving). That is really what our Lord is trying to say here. So be encouraged in your giving. You will be blessed!

As tomorrow is Good Friday may I encourage you this Eastertide to reflect on these two great instructions of our Lord. We remember all he has accomplished on the cross by taking communion, and we love one another as he first loved us (John 13:34). Let me leave the final words to our Lord, who in these words to Nicodemus sums us these two final instructions to the Twelve.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that all who believe in Him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

AMEN.