

## Maundy Thursday 2020

On this last night with his closest friends, Jesus gathers them around a table. Here, he imparts words and actions that contain the essence of his message and ministry. Known today as the Last Supper, when he breaks the bread and passes the cup, Jesus gives us the words and actions for what has become our Eucharist celebration. Ahead of time, he gave the lens through which to see and understand the redemptive power of his death and resurrection, which would take place in the hours and days that followed.

When we read the gospel account in John chapter 13, we see that Jesus opens his heart at this table. The conversation between Jesus and Peter, and Jesus' words to the disciples are recorded at length, because of their significance. I'm certain it was only looking back, after the crisis of Friday, Saturday and Sunday, that the disciples could appreciate the power of all that had taken place and all they had shared that Thursday night. After all, none of them (except possibly Judas) sat around that table thinking "This is the last supper."

In his words, Jesus gives the New Commandment, the new mandate for all believers to follow: Love one another, as I have loved you. Again, they would only appreciate the full meaning of that self-giving love through the events that were to follow.

But, as he works to convey what he most wants his companions to know, Jesus does not start with spoken words. Instead, he takes a towel, a basin, and water and he washes the feet of his friends. This act of service prepares them for the words that are to follow. It makes them vulnerable, opens their hearts and their ears. As Jan Richardson writes, this foot washing becomes sacred: 'it is Jesus' vocabulary in action. The Word made flesh'.

On this night, Holy Thursday or Maundy Thursday, Jesus prepares the future church in word and action, for a way of life that will become the standard of what it means to be a Christ follower. As I said when I began this message: he gave us the essentials.

During this time of our country's lockdown, I keep thinking of the way we have had to redefine "The essentials": the essential services, the essential groceries, the essential needs that must be met. During this time, our priorities are shifting.

I'm sure the disciples imagined that things would be the same tomorrow. And yet after that Thursday night, the world would never be the same. We also might be dreaming of when things will return to normal. A future tomorrow when we will reconnect in one another's presence, and move and act freely again. But we also know, that after this, the world won't be the same. And it shouldn't be. While we are living in lockdown, trying to hold onto the essentials, our true values are rising to the surface.

We have an opportunity to change how we think and how we see the world. We can let go of lies, pretence and assumptions and imagine new possibilities. Even now, in our time of retreat, we are actively creating what will be the new normal. N.T Wright wrote that, even now in isolation, “we become small shrines where the presence and healing love of God can dwell. And out of that there can emerge... new acts of kindness, new scientific understanding, new hope.” In our decisions, in our choices and words and actions, we can cooperate with God to overcome the pain and suffering of our world.

Maybe after Jesus’ death on that Friday, the disciples wondered what they had missed that Thursday at supper. *This is our Thursday*. Let’s pay attention. On Holy Thursday, in the washing of his friends’ feet, Jesus was present to the moment, present in serving, in demonstrating love and in demonstrating what was intended to be the new normal: love one another as I have loved you. If we are present to this moment, this Thursday time, not knowing what more lies ahead, we can realise that we are laying the foundation for our society’s new normal.

In the words of the poet Ruth Everson,

I have seen  
The world from  
Upside-down and  
Heaven is on the ground.

God’s kingdom is being built in us and among us, in our own hearts and homes, in our efforts to reach out and remain united, even though we are apart, in our preparations for an Easter that will be unlike any we have ever experienced.

Let’s build with care, renewing our minds and hearts into God’s likeness through our acts of love and service. To those who are providing essential services through the work you do: we thank you most profoundly and pray for your protection. And for everyone watching this, may you discover that heaven is on the ground: Christ is present in you. May you know that you are not alone; your very existence matters, and you are loved.

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