

Thursday 9th April 2020 Livestreamed from the Deanery, Grahamstown 6 p.m.		Maundy Thursday The Evening Eucharist of the Lord's Supper
Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14	Ps 116:1-2, 11- 18	1 Corinthians 11:23-26 John 13:1-17, 31b-35
Love one another		

“Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” (Jn 13:1b)

We gather together this evening at a unique time in our lives, in the middle of the COVID19 lock down, a Holy Week like none other. These sacred days are normally marked by wonderful acts of worship when we meet together in one place, to hear the word of God read and preached, and to celebrate the Eucharist. Instead, we are in our various homes, and instead of being in the Cathedral Claire and I are in the Cory Room, in front of my phone, and the Cathedral Facebook page is our platform! What a time this is!

But perhaps it is not so unfamiliar. In the early days of radio, messages were broadcast into everyone's homes. People listened avidly to sports matches, and radio commentators were a gift to us all. I still remember listening to the 3 match commentary in 1974, when the British Lions, captained by Willy John McBride, toured SA! And now with TV, we are all used to taking part in world events while at home. Royal weddings and funerals, the Queen's Speech, the inauguration of Parliament, the swearing in of the President, even the nightly news on TV... well, perhaps sharing in worship via facebook is not so strange after all. So let's do our best to participate.

THE THREE GREAT DAYS

Our service this evening is the start of the Three Great Days, the Triduum of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter. We walk

with Jesus through all that happens: tonight he washes our feet, he breaks bread and shares the cup with us, and he gives us the new commandment to love one another. On Good Friday we gather at the foot of the cross “as those who know that Christ will be victorious in the battle against darkness, sin and death.”¹ On Easter Day we celebrate our Lord’s resurrection.

Our liturgists will tell us that actually these are not three separate events, but one great act of worship: they are all joined into a single act of God in our salvation. This “is not merely an historical rehearsal” of the events that saved us, but “a solemn entering into the saving mystery of the passion-death-resurrection event in the life of Jesus”². We encounter the nature and mystery of what we call sacraments: “the outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace”³.

Tonight, centrally, we have the sacrament of the Eucharist; but we could also say that we have the sacrament of love as the Lord washes our feet; and at the end of the service, when Jesus goes to Gethsemane and we follow him into the darkness, we could say that we have the sacrament of desolation. His darkest hour is also ours. We plumb the depths in the hours ahead.

But for now, let’s savour this time of worship. We enter into mystery, into wonder, into joy, into our salvation, won for us by Jesus Christ.

¹ Jenneker, *Word & Worship 2012 - 2013*, 93

² *ACSA Lectionary 2019-2020*, 31

³ AAPB pg 438

MAUNDY THURSDAY

The name “Maundy” comes from the Latin words, *mandatum novum*, “a new commandment” that Jesus gave, to love one another as I have loved you (John 13:34), in our Gospel reading.

This is a service of riches and depth. For us this evening, during this time of Covid19, there are three things to hold onto:

1. Memory

Tonight is a night on which we remember the great things that God has done – the Passover; liberation from slavery (Exodus 12); the act of God in Christ; the gift of his body and blood (1 Corinthians 11). When we remember, we “bring to the present”, we relive these great events. The power of Christ to save us is here, now, amongst us, in our homes. To remember is to encounter Jesus amongst us, with us, with you and me. And as we remember, we are “re-membered” – we are made members once again of the body of Christ, the church of God.

We remember the saving work of God in Christ: his body broken for us, his blood shed for us. His life poured out for us. His love for us. A sign and reminder of the love of God for the world. A sign of light in the midst of darkness. Whenever we celebrate the Eucharist, the presence of Christ is amongst us. So we re-member with joy and gratitude. God has given us this great gift of love.

2. Service

The image of Jesus kneeling to wash the feet of his disciples has become the central image of service. Love poured out. Giving and serving no matter what the cost. A picture of humble leadership. Now we are used to it, an annual display of humility as the priest kneels at our feet to wash them. For me, washing the feet of parishioners over the years is a strange experience. Joyful, a

privilege, a moment of humility, a delight as I see people smile at me. Feet tell stories – of youth and potential, of age and years of weary walking...

Tonight, during the COVID lockdown, Jesus washes our feet. We receive this gift from him, as he washes away the exhaustion and the weariness and the despair. He is with us in our fears. He washes our tired feet.

And we wash one another's feet. It is happening all around us at this time: people packing food parcels, others drawing up lists of those who need them; others making donations; health care workers testing people; shop assistants and food packers, farmers, drivers, all who are keeping food supplies in the shops; doctors and nurses... the many people on the ground, all our essential services. Washing our feet. Thank you to all. Let's continue to wash one another's feet in the weeks to come.

3. Unity

Love one another. Do this in memory of me. Two commandments given to us by Jesus. The sacrament of his body and blood. The sacrament of his love. When we love, we are a sign of Christ. These days of lock down have made us realise how much we are people of community. We need people around us. We belong together. We cannot live in isolation, not for ever. I am enjoying the social media memes and the tv adverts that dream of us being together again.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another... Familiar words, words tonight of hope and promise and blessing. Yes, we do get frustrated and irritated with one another, but we do belong together. When we love one another, Jesus is present amongst us.

CONCLUSION

Like Jesus, may we continue to love to the end.

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Dean of Grahamstown
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