

Maundy Thursday John 13: 1-17, 31b-35

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Maundy Thursday is about remembering.

Remembering and honoring the Jewish tradition that nurtured Jesus. Remembering and honoring Jesus's last meal in that tradition. Remembering and honoring the last supper of Passover which was itself a sacred festival of remembrance. Remembering the Exodus out of Egypt.

So Maundy Thursday is about remembering and honoring.

Remembering also what Paul *remembered* he had heard about the strange words Jesus said on that last Passover night of remembrance that have now been passed down to us and given a new meaning.

Take eat this is my body given for you. Do this for remembrance of me.

In the Eucharist which we will celebrate tonight for the last time before the Great Vigil of Easter, remembering becomes re-membering in all senses of that word: remembering and re-membering as we offer the broken bodies of our lives in

living sacrifice at the Eucharist so that we might be remembered and re-membered: healed and made whole.

Beyond what you are St Augustine said of the bread and wine
And become what you receive: The body of Christ, food for the whole world.

The words Jesus used for the first time on his last Passover night sound strange at first and cannibalistic and while much can be said about why this might be, far from desecrating the human body or ripping it to pieces *as the world so often does:* separating one person from another or raising one person up higher up than another or pitting one person against another, Jesus's words *re-member* us, lifting up our sacred wholeness and connectedness *in* him, affirming that from now on we belong to each other and to God: one table, one body, one blood, one bread, one cup.

About the foot washing:

And yet we are broken and have made mistakes. I know I have. And suffered losses and caused and born pain. Bring all of this today to the altar to be washed. *Unless I wash you*, Jesus said, *you have no share with me.* The call is simple and it is true. And your feet are fine just as they are but, I promise you, they will feel different afterwards.

About the stripping of the altar:

The stripping of the altar which ends this service was historically a service performed without witnesses by faithful (and often unthanked) altar guild members who continue to do the hard, incessant work of preparing the sanctuary every Sunday during the year as well as for all the services of Holy week. One day somebody saw the work they were doing after the Maundy Thursday service and wept at the symbolism.

The altar stripped bare, the crosses covered in black: these actions spoke louder to them perhaps than any words spoken from the pulpit about the travails of grief. The work of the altar guild is faith in action, faith embodied. It also is a work of justice and peace.

Maundy Thursday is about remembering and honoring not only what we have been given but also what we have lost.

Acknowledging what is irreplaceable. Grieving that things won't go back exactly the same. The loss is real. The grief is real. The scars remain. So come wash and be washed. Be fed. And then wait with us tonight and leave in silence at the stripping of the altar.

Gethsemane

Mary Oliver (adapted)

The grass never sleeps.

Or the roses.

Nor does the lily have a secret eye that shuts until morning.
Jesus said, wait with me. But the disciples slept.
And Jesus said, again, wait with me. Wait with me.

And maybe the stars did, maybe
And maybe the wind wound itself into a silver tree, and didn't
move,
And maybe, the lake far away, where once he walked as on a
blue pavement, lay still and waited, wild awake.

But... Oh the dear bodies,, that could not
keep that vigil,
how they must have wept,
The next day
knowing that this too
must be a part of the story,
forever.

*Let me wash you, Jesus said otherwise you have no share with
me. Take, eat Jesus said, This is my body. Wait with me, Jesus
said. And then again, Wait with me.*

Amen

