

Reflection for Maundy Thursday 2026

Readings: Exodus 12: 1-14; 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26; John 13: 1-17, 31b-35.

'Actions speak louder than words' ... or so they say!

Here we are, entering the most important few days of the Church's calendar, days which should even eclipse the celebrations of Christmas.

Where Christmas has the lead in through Advent, bringing us ultimately to the birth of a child; **this** time is more complex.

We have journeyed through Lent, a penitential season, a time for reflection and looking deeper at what God is doing in the world and in us. A time which has led us into Holy Week through the gate of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

Hopefully, in your journey through Lent, you have had time to "Listen to Him"! To pick up what Jesus has been saying to the world, and reflect on what God requires us to do about it.

We have heard what Jesus has to say about God, now he gives us foundational teaching through his example for us to live by. His example and his actions.

And now, on the last night of his earthly life, Jesus gathered with his disciples in the Upper Room, to partake in the Passover Feast with them, to remember the events we heard in our first reading.

Tonight **we remember** the gift of the example he gave us, the gifts of humble service, of a meal to remember him by, his exhortation to love and finally, his request for us to pray for and with him. Actions, even more than words.

Taken on its own, out of context, we forget the significance of Jesus' actions, we forget what has been going on for the disciples, ... we forget ... and it is easy for this act of service, the act of a slave, to become another of those quirky things that Christians "do" just before Easter.

Imagine the week the disciples had had. No, take it back further, probably the last three years. Men and women adrift from their "ordinary lives", finding purpose in the teaching and healing and example of this charismatic, radical, inspiring man / prophet / rabbi. The words they had heard, the ideas they had been exposed to, the extraordinary things they had witnessed and experienced. More recently, the growing opposition from the authorities, the growing tension, not only in Jesus but in the crowds wherever they went, the sense that something dramatic was about to happen. Now they gather, in an upper room in a house in Jerusalem.

Jesus acts, not only as host, but most startling of all, as the lowly house servant or slave whose job it was to greet the guests by washing their feet.

Let us just focus a moment on who Jesus is, who we believe him to be, who his disciples were realizing him to be.

When you think of the lovely piece from Paul's letter to the Philippians which we heard on Sunday:

... who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. ... [Phil 2: 6-7]

or as John 17 has Jesus say:

So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. [John 17: 5]

Jesus has a point to prove here, a lesson to teach. His disciples were forever bickering about who was the greatest amongst them. In Luke's version of the Last Supper, the argument broke out straight after they had shared the meal.

But here, Jesus, son of God, who was "with God before the beginning of time", is stripping off and washing his disciples' feet. The master is taking on the servant role. How much more should the servant, the disciple, even the follower two millennia later, be prepared to take on the servant role, in humility, not in pride? Jesus says:

"For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you." [John 13: 15]

On this night, Jesus broke bread with those who gathered with him and called them to do this, to continue to do this in remembrance of him. We heard in our reading from Corinthians, Paul recount what had been passed down to him about this event.

The letter to the church in Corinth contains the earliest record of the Eucharist. Perhaps only twenty to twenty-five years after the original event. While Paul's version is our oldest, it is possibly the clearest and most accurate to what actually happened in that "Upper Room" because by the time the gospels were being written, already the writers were beginning to put their own spin, their own theology, on the story.

What I find so profound, is the fact that after two millennia, we are still 'doing it' "in remembrance of him".

One of the most powerful things we remember this night is the giving of the "New Commandment". It is something that from the beginning of the early church that set "Followers of the Way", the early church, apart. It was how they were recognized – by their love. It wasn't just the love of each other, as witnessed in the reading from Acts 2, where they shared everything in common, but it was in their love for all people.

Sadly, over the millennia, we haven't been so good at keeping this, as we have been at celebrating the Eucharist! It is a fact of life - humanity is fatally flawed. The one commandment which Jesus gave those who would follow him, is the one we seem to find the hardest to keep.

Love one another, not with the conditional love we usually use in our relationships, but that sacrificial love which expects nothing in return, which gets buffeted by the winds of change in moods and circumstances, but which remains firm. Jesus still loved, even as he was betrayed and deserted by those who had followed his every move for the previous three years.

"Love one another, just as I have loved you, love one another."

At the end of the meal Jesus and his friends went out, across the Kidron Valley to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus wanted to pray, but the sense of dread was heavy upon him, so he wanted his friends with him, praying for him, near him.

And so, to the Watch, the Vigil to "wait and pray with me for one hour".

Tonight, this Maundy Thursday evening, is all about love - the action of a slave, given in love, the action of sharing of a meal, given in love, and a commandment to love. Now it was the disciples turn to give back a little of Jesus' love. To support him in his hour of need, to pray with him - and yet, they failed to do that. Sleep and selfish distractions got in the way.

Do we allow our own agendas to get in the way? Are we able to "wait and pray" with Jesus for an hour, or is our response 'what's the point, the soldiers will come anyway!'

Tonight, at the end of this service, while we leave in silence, you are invited to stay and pray, the church will be open for up to an hour, for those who would like to honour this part of the story, to sit and reflect on Jesus' request, to be with him, praying and supporting him, on this most difficult and profound nights.

So as this most holy time begins, have we listened to and for Him during Lent?

How is this year any different from the other years?

Do our actions speak louder than any words we may speak?

Jesus called us above all to love one another, with an unconditional, pure love that doesn't expect, doesn't demand, but a love that just *is*, waiting, supporting, accepting. Amen.

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