

Maundy Thursday, April 16, 2025
Sermon for St. Michael's
The Rev. Joshua Wong

Focus: Maundy Thursday means hope

Function: I am sharing this sermon to my congregation to say that Maundy Thursday escorts us into a promised future of God's liberation.

Gospel: John 13:1-17, 31b-35

This afternoon, many around the world will commemorate a feast day during Holy Week known as Maundy Thursday, or Holy Thursday. On this day, Christians commemorate Jesus' last meal with his disciples before he is arrested and executed. Every Holy Week, Christians move toward Good Friday as the most somber and most significant day of the year. Depending on your tradition, on Friday, some may sit in silence, reverence a cross, listen to a sermon, recite the Seven Last Sentences of Jesus while he was on the cross, or fast in quiet prayer. You may weep, sing mournful hymns, or feel the weight of injustice. It is a sad day, keeping watch with the execution of an innocent man. For centuries, Christians have been told that everything changed that day, the cross was the bridge between the sinful world and the world of salvation. The cross is all that matters. But in actuality, Maundy Thursday plays a significant role to prepare us for Good Friday.

Good Friday is somber, but what if it isn't the most significant day of Holy Week? Diana Butler Bass, an Episcopal American Christian historian and an advocate for Progressive theology reminds of the significance and role Maundy Thursday holds in Holy Week. What if the most significant day was the day before Good Friday—the day of foot washing and the supper, the day of conviviality and friendship, the day that occurred right after Passover, and a few days after the throngs of people shouted, “Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” Maundy Thursday escorts us into a promised future of God's liberation.

Diana Butler Bass continues to say, “Christians mostly think of Maundy Thursday as the run-up to the real show on Friday. And, because the church has placed such emphasis on Friday, we interpret Thursday through the events of the cross. Thus, when Jesus shares bread and wine with his friends, it becomes a prefiguring of his broken body and the shedding of his blood for the forgiveness of sins. We return to the cross all the time. We see Thursday through Friday. From that angle, it becomes morbid. A doomed man's final meal while the execution clock ticks.”

But it's important to remember that his friends at the table didn't experience it that way. They weren't thinking about a cross or a blood sacrifice. They saw Friday through Thursday. They were celebrating Passover. They were in Jerusalem with friends and family, and as commentators say, it wasn't just twelve guys at a long

table — sorry, Leonardo Di Vinci, instead it was a big, busy, bustling holiday meal to commemorate God freeing their ancestors from slavery. Passover is a joyful meal, not a somber one. And, because Passover was about liberation from a hostile oppressor, it was filled with political expectations and possibilities. Would God free them likewise from Roman tyranny through Jesus? Was the promised kingdom at hand? They were thinking about their history and their future, and they were enjoying the supper together. Liberation did happen, they just weren't expecting how the Messiah was going to make this happen.

Jesus loved meals. They'd shared so many together. When we go back through the gospels and see how many of the stories take place at tables, distributing food, or inviting people to supper, we see the importance of food as a way to gather for community. Throughout his ministry, Jesus welcomed everyone to the table. Tax collectors, sinners, women, Gentiles, the poor, and faithful Jews. As a host, Jesus never thought about who would be seated next to whom. All he wanted was for everybody to come, to be at the table, and share food and conversation.

Maundy Thursday was exactly that, it took place at the table. The guests didn't know, but the Last Supper represented the old world order. The last meal under Rome, the last meal under any empire.

You can think of that meal as the first feast of the kingdom that has come. The first meal of the new age, a new world of mutual service, equality, abundance, generosity, and unending thanksgiving. It was a celebration of the new Kingdom of God—Pass the cup, keep it going, hand to hand, filled and refilled, abundant, time after time. This night is the final night of dominion, the end of slavery; and this night is the first night of communion, the beginning of true freedom. Jesus says, “I will no longer call you servants but friends.” Maundy Thursday is the celebration of a new world order that has come!

This table **is** the hinge of history. Maundy Thursday **is** the Last Supper and the First Feast. The Holy Thursday Revolution of the world. Yes, the road to the cross is in sight, and Jesus prepares us by giving us a new commandment, that we love one another. Jesus says, “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Maundy Thursday is significant to hope and promise. Let us prepare ourselves by loving one another as we go forward with Jesus on the journey to the Cross. Amen.