

Maundy Thursday 2018

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[0:00] John 13. Now before the feast of Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

Matthew 26. And when they had sung a hymn, they went to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to them, You will all fall away because of me this night.

For it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Here we are in Maundy Thursday.

I'm fortunate to have one of my co-workers with me, and I didn't tell him he was going to be part of the sermon. But he can also assign to the fact that sometimes when we're in the office, I don't speak so good.

And sometimes I don't express myself well. So there was a little bit of a back and forth one day where I said, Maundy Thursday. And everybody in the office, all they could hear was, Monday Thursday.

[1:22] It was back and forth. Maundy Thursday or Monday Thursday. And I straightened them out. The word Maundy, I also thought I understood what that meant.

I'm still learning what this Anglican thing is all about. I thought Maundy kind of was a term to describe the moody atmosphere of this event.

Like, how do you feel about having to pay your taxes? And I thought, well, I felt Maundy about it. But that's not what Maundy means at all.

Maundy means commandment. In obedience to the commandment that Christ gave us to be a servant to others, to follow his example in what we're going to do in the foot washing.

I spoke with Father Evans and talking about the amount of moving parts in this particular service. And it's hard as a preacher to cover everything that goes on.

[2:21] So this year we're not going to spend as much time speaking out the foot washing. And we're going to spend more time talking about the table. I'd like you to join me in a thought experiment for the next few minutes as we examine this passage of scripture.

I want you to believe that the words Jesus tells us tonight in this passage in Luke are real. That he's telling the truth.

You might not believe that in conviction. But I'd like you to take a minute and as a thought exercise play it out.

There's one time I didn't believe that the words that Jesus said in this passage were true. And I gave Jesus a chance and I listened to him and said, you know, I'm going to read through the Bible once and I'm going to say, Jesus, I'm going to do this crazy thing and actually believe that everything you've written is true.

And it changed my life. So if you'll give me 15, 20 minutes, just come along with me. Come to the table. Come to the table that Christ lays out for his disciples.

[3:38] Come to the table.

Come to the table. She's been on me a little bit about my driving practices. So the quote I give may be more of a paraphrase than an exact quote.

But this is on the front porch of what I could best describe as a Unitarian organization. And what it said was, the freedom of the mind is the beginning of all freedoms.

In other words, the only thing that's holding Mark Steele back is Mark Steele himself. When I grew up, from my pulpit I heard warnings against the teaching about the power of positive thinking.

I don't hear that phrase as much now, but it was out there, and it still exists in some people's vocabulary. And lest you think I'm nailing the coffin on the lid of a more liberal camp, conservatives

always had this idea of glorifying those who could pull themselves up by their bootstraps.

[5:20] It seems from every corner of America through its history, we've had this idea that somehow if we work enough, we can get ourselves out of whatever situation we find.

In other words, the fix to my problem must lie somewhere within me, must lie in my ability to cooperate with somebody else, if I can join the right organization, follow the right method.

And somehow I can pull myself up out of this hole I found myself in. Let's come to the table today. Let's think about these 12 disciples and their rabbi.

Underneath the foot of Rome, on the verge of genocide. If the Romans were enough, they were also caught underneath the heel of Pharisees, who were Pharisaical.

I mean, we use them to actually describe problems that we have with our leadership today. It's a rough, rough picture. Let's consider how Christ approaches the table of the Last Supper.

[6:29] For him, he does it with joy. This is the table of the covenant. This is not the first time the Lord of Israel has approached a table of the covenant.

And it's not the first time he has approached his chosen children as friends. We can remember, as we look back in Genesis, the angel of the Lord approaching the other angels to the tents of Abram and Sarai to announce the pending birth of the child of promise.

He came there as a friend. He came there, and Abraham served him a table of fellowship. There's another striking instance that we'll look at in our Bibles momentarily that happens right before the announcement and confirmation of the covenant to the congregation of Israel.

They had recently escaped the clutches of Egypt. Now, covenant is not a word that's really used outside of church at all today.

I would note we have a higher than usual percentage of attorneys in our congregation. I'm guessing you guys use covenant in the workplace a little more than I do in my workplace.

[7:47] But a covenant is a promise deeper than a promise. It exists.

Swear by no one higher. Do you understand what I'm trying to say here? When God was so moved by his love for the world, he entered into a covenant arrangement with all who came to him in faith.

To all that would receive him, he gave them the right to become the children of God. And just as has happened every time before he had established a covenant with his people, whether it was initiated or expanded, God himself came there to stand by the arrangement.

Let's consider Exodus chapter 24. If you have your pew Bibles, turn there. I apologize. I did not find the pew Bible page. By the way, I was raised in a church from the age of three.

I don't know how many times I read through the Bible. This is like a passage of the Bible that I somehow discovered like when I was 27. I mean, it's like 27 years of reading the Bible. I've never seen this passage here.

[9:27] And it's really stuck with me since I discovered that. Verse 6. And Moses took half of the blood. Oh, the blood.

He put it into basins. And half the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant, and he read it in the hearing of the people.

And they said, All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and he threw it on the people, and said, Behold, the blood of the covenant the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and 70 of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet, as it were, a pavement, a sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness.

And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel. They beheld God, and ate and drank. Were I Leonardo da Vinci, and had painted that picture of the Last Supper, I would have painted that, hung it on my wall, and I would have turned back to Exodus 24, and I would have tried to paint this picture here.

[10:53] I would have hung those two pictures next to each other on the wall, and stared at them, and asked, God, what are you doing here? As we come to this table, the table of the Last Supper, we see these new elders of Israel, these brash young apostles.

We saw the promise that they will rule over the twelve tribes, judge over the twelve tribes of Israel. These young fools, were again sitting at the table with the God of Israel, and he takes again the blood of the covenant, and offers to them.

As we've seen in our Holy Week readings, there are some major differences between the Exodus passages, and what Christ is doing here. One big deal, they actually handle Jesus. It's not as in Moses' day, when God only looked upon them, but he could not touch. These men physically interacted with Jesus.

God became flesh and dwelt among us. And as Jesus comes to this table, he prepares to inaugurate the everlasting rule of the kingdom of God.

[12:11] He takes the bread, and announces it is his broken body. And the wine is poured out, and it's his shed blood. Suddenly we remember the awful blood of Moses, dashed against the altar, and splashed upon everybody that gathered to worship.

And we know that our sins, everything that we think, say, or do, that separates us from a holy God, will not allow us to have a relationship with him. And it is because it is us who has sinned as men and women, it is our blood which is required.

It cannot be the blood of animals, for the guilt does not lie on bulls and sheep. And the horrible reality sinks in. We begin to understand exactly what it is Jesus is talking about here.

Because it is God who wills this new covenant relationship, and because we are helpless on our own to make it happen, he has stepped in to pay with human blood. Jesus, the only begotten Son of the Father, is also the only available and final sacrifice.

Amen. The author of Hebrews says, But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands.

[13:36] That is to say, it is not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goat and calves, but he entered the most holy place, once for all, by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.

The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so they are outwardly clean.

How much more then will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God.

For this reason, Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from sins committed under the first covenant.

Now, if we sit at the table and we listen, and we do something different than the disciples did, if we actually believe the words that Jesus has said, all that he said is very disturbing.

[14:51] If I came to you and announced to you right now that tomorrow morning I was going to die, and not only was I going to die in order to save your life, would your reaction be what the reaction the disciples were?

No. They immediately, the first thing they do is start, but it's almost like they don't even hear what he's trying to tell them. This is the most confusing part of our Maundy Thursday account.

You would think that if Jesus drops in and gives us news, it would change what they are. This is a conversation me and Corleen have been having all week as we have the reading from our prayers and are considering it.

If I found out the person who was closest to me, my wife, was going to die tomorrow, and she went to pray at the Garden of Gethsemane, I think I would be able to stay up a little more than an hour before falling asleep.

So we consider here the actions we see in Luke 22. We see the actions of a traitor, Judas. We see bickering over who got to be the leader.

[16:09] We see the foreshadowing of Peter's denial and his idea that his isn't just a denial here at the table. He thinks he's such a manly man that he's just going to join Jesus.

Whatever Jesus does, he can do just as well. Note a difference, a little bit of a side note. It is his most faithful and quiet disciples, the women who follow Jesus, who will be with him tomorrow at the cross.

But I guess my question is, can we fault the disciples' fear in the matter of desertion? In other words, is it because they're scared that we should give them a pass?

No, the problem here isn't their fear. There's been plenty of saints who have been afraid and been faithful. I mentioned David in the last sermon I gave.

As David faced Goliath, he was full of fear, but he actually believed the words that God gave him. Here the disciples don't believe him. Here in the lives of the apostles, they had all the head knowledge they needed to see that God was at work in the approaching death of Jesus.

[17:29] In one of the parallel passages, Matthew 26, Jesus actually goes to the disciples and says, they are coming to take me for crucifixion in two days.

It doesn't get much clearer than that. Maundy's service has been one of the most interesting ones since I've come to this church.

We do a really good job in our liturgy focusing on Christ, lifting him up, focusing on it. This is the one service where for a brief second, we look at us and we look at our picture in the redemption story. And what we find there is abject failure. And we quickly look back to Jesus. I don't want to just play random scripture word association here, but as I prepare, sometimes thoughts pop into my mind, little pieces of other scripture.

I cannot help as reading this account about Paul, who wrote about the abiding nature of faith, hope, and love in his first epistle to the Corinthians. And then I remember John telling us in his gospel that we must abide in Christ, our source of life, in order to bear fruit.

[18:56] And as I came to this account and read over and over and over again, I remember that these very, these disciples, they gather and they show no faith, they show no hope, and they show no love.

Because they have failed to abide in Christ, who sat at the table with them. They don't have love, because the love of Christ has not yet been shed abroad in their hearts.

The author of Hebrews in the passage we read earlier said that Christ died so that we could receive the promised inheritance. That kingdom is part of that inheritance.

The love of Christ is part of that inheritance. Here, though, at the table, the twelve people have no love. We find one person with love present at the table.

And for us, across all time and all places, that love is enough. It is more than sufficient. It is the greatest love. Yet the disciples just don't get it.

[20:08] They don't have love. Because love is what love does. And for Christ, Judas is turning, is planning right now to turn Jesus over for monetary gain.

The first thing they do after this Passover meal is fight. Who gets to be number one? Who gets to be number one in the chain of command? It's just amazing. This isn't love.

Love certainly can stay up more than an hour at Gethsemane. And Jesus has faith. I know it's a hard thing for us to understand.

But you have to consider one of the seven words that we'll look at tomorrow. He says, Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. This is a demonstration of faith.

But where is the faith of these apostles at the table? Saddest verse in Scripture. Mark 14, 50. It's real short. And they all left him and they fled.

[21:13] There's no faith here as they slink away to hide in their secluded rooms. No confidence that Christ will do what he said. We'll find much more faith in a thief hanging on a cross tomorrow.

And without faith and without love, there is no hope. Try to understand that tonight as we slink out in silence. It's marrying the same actions of those first disciples on Maundy Thursday.

What would losing Jesus mean for you? I know that's not possible. But that's what they thought as they went out into the darkness.

What if you were truly convinced that Jesus was gone? I can remember a time in my life where I denied Christ.

And one word sums up my experience. Despair. Complete and utter darkness. There was no hope there. But Jesus was filled with hope.

[22:13] Not a Pollyanna-ish optimism. He was realistic. He suffered. He cries out shortly to the Father, Take away this cup if at all possible.

But tonight as he stands at this table, His hope rests on those promises which he himself will deliver to us.

He looks past his resurrection and tells him, I will drink this cup with you again in the kingdom of God. And he leaves tonight to make it so. What a Savior.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.