

## Maundy Thursday-2009

*“A new commandment I give to you that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” John 13:34.*

Maundy Thursday was known to have been celebrated in commemoration of the Lord's Supper since the Council of Hippo in 393 A.D. It is curious that it gets its name from the Latin words *mandatum novum*, new mandate, a commandment to love one another. It was instituted early on by Jesus' last actions on the first Maundy Thursday-foot washing and the institution of the Lord's Supper. Yet the English church has never been known to make foot washing a major part of its rites. Instead, the institution of the Lord's Supper has become the rite most associated with the Thursday in Holy Week. Tonight, we are here to be surrounded by and enmeshed within the heritage of the Jewish Passover, the Christian institution of the Lord's Supper, and the foot washing ritual practiced by some denominations. We are also here to prepare ourselves for the last act of God's Divine drama in the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God.

For over 3,200 years, Jews have gathered together to remember the harvest feast of the Unleaven Bread and the Passover of the first born of Israelites in Egypt, near this time. It was on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan that the lamb which was set aside since the 10<sup>th</sup> day was roasted. Families or small units of the Hebrews gathered to have a meal and to retell the meaning of the various actions of their deliverance. Specific plans included the slaughter of a yearling lamb or goat, the smearing of blood from the sacrifice on the doorposts of each house and the roasting of the sacrificial animal which was then to be consumed totally. Three questions were asked and answered for young children. Bitter herbs were eaten, later to be dipped into sweet mixture to remind them that the agony of slavery was taken away by the sweetness of a loving God. Psalms were sung in quiet celebration that the death angel of Egypt might pass over their first born and allowed them to embark upon their exodus from Egyptian slavery and its harsh realities.

In commemoration of Passover over two thousand years ago, a dozen men celebrated a fellowship (Chaburah) meal together in the upper room of Mary of Jerusalem. On that particular night according to St. John, no lamb had been slain because Jesus was to be the sacrificial Lamb of God. His blood was to be smeared on the doorposts of their hearts in order that eternal death may pass them and their descendants by forever. His body was to be broken, his blood to be shed in order that they and we might partake of the new life in Christ Jesus. Tonight, over 2000 years later, we are gathered to remember and to participate in his ensuing sacrifice.

At the time of the ceremonial washing of feet just before the meal, the foot washing was to be done by a slave. That night was to be different, for Jesus pulled off his outer garment, took a wash basin with water and began washing the feet of his disciples. “Not mine.” Peter said. “You will never wash my feet.” Then Jesus said to Peter, “Unless I wash you (Peter) you will have no share in me.” Peter then wanted to be washed all over, but Jesus indicated that only his feet needed washing because they had collected the defilement of treading upon unclean places. Let us remember the signs of humility and service that foot washing

symbolizes and become attentive of our ministry of service.

One disciple would betray Jesus because of the defilement of selfishness and greed in his heart. Another disciple would deny him because of the lack of courage. And most of the disciples would abandon him because of the defilement of fear in their hearts. Tonight, let us surrender our hearts to Christ Jesus that defilement may be vanquished and that our hearts may become hearts of flesh and courage and not hearts of stone.

We have also gathered tonight to celebrate the institution of the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist. It is not only a time to remember, it is a time to participate in the sacrifice of Jesus for the salvation of the world. In doing so, we enter into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In it, we offer Eucharist, thanksgiving for the blessings already received and that are being received. In it, we share in fellowship with all Christian throughout the world who are in solidarity with us tonight. Tonight, we have gathered to be one with Jesus and with one another in Christ's sacrificial offering for the salvation of the world. Thereby, we become further strengthen, equipped and renewed for our servant ministry in the world here and beyond the walls of this sanctuary.

So, tonight, let us remember our Passover: how God through Christ has passed over our sins, committed or omitted. Let us remember Christ's mandate to honor God and to serve one another. And let us partake of the final Eucharist before Easter as we receive the sacrament, strip the altar, and go out in silence to meditate upon Christ' sacrifice fo us.

Let us pray. Lord fill us with gratitude for your sacrifice for us. Fill us with love for each other and enliven our service to others. Amen.