



Mark 14:12-26
Maundy Thursday
Symbols of Love

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Maundy Thursday

I mentioned this at the start of the service, but in case you missed it: The Thursday before Easter is called Maundy Thursday. “Maundy” is the Latin word for “command” and comes from Jesus’ statement to the disciples in John 13:34 when he says to them, “A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” This is just after he has washed the disciples’ feet, something that John tells us about from their Passover meal, but the other three gospel writers don’t include. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all focus on Jesus’ breaking of the Passover bread and sharing the Passover cup of wine.

This is one of those times when we should be grateful that God inspired more than one person to write an account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I know some people get hung up on passages where the gospel writers present different information about the same events and then people will try to pit the gospels against each other and say they’re contradictory, and question their reliability. But the fact is, if two people report an event, there are going to be different things reported about that event. It happens every day in the news, for example. Or ask two members of a family about a trip they took, and you might here some pretty different stories told. But the basic outline of the vacation – such as where they went and where they stayed, and so forth, would remain the same. It’s the same with the gospel accounts: the basics, and even many of the details, of what happened, and the primary outcomes will be the same...but different people remember, and discover, and report some different things about the same event.

One of the things that is clear from all four gospels about the life of Jesus – from his birth to his resurrection – is that he was no ordinary human being. He had the power of God in him. Have you ever wondered what you would do if you could have all the power in the universe at your disposal? The possibilities would be endless. And they could be endlessly good, or endlessly bad, or a mixture of the two. I can assure you that if I had that much power, the Mariners would win the World Series at least once in my

lifetime, and the Yankees would never win it again. My kids would be more obedient, I'd have a house on Lake Washington, I'd invent a Ferrari that seats 6 people, and of course, I'd have more hair.

And notice: those first things that pop into my head all revolve around one person: me. Pretty selfish, isn't it? That's not all that loving, except for myself and my own desires. You don't have to answer this now, but what would you do with all the power in the universe? Perhaps fortunately, it's a moot question, because none of us have that power. But hypotheticals are fun, none-the-less.

With Jesus, however, it wasn't hypothetical. Jesus Christ has all the power in the universe. Along with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, he always has. Notice, however, that he didn't use it in ways like I probably would or as you perhaps might. Jesus has all that power right there in the upper room with his disciples. And what does he do?

He washes the disciples' feet. He has the power of God Almighty, and he washes their feet. It's a tangible act of love that was applicable and relatable in their dusty, first-century culture where everyone wore what we sometimes affectionately call, "Jesus sandals". We can still understand it and adapt the idea of serving others to our own culture and relationships.

But the ultimate act of love that Jesus gave us is less repeatable: He went to the cross, giving his life on our behalf. He has all the power in the universe, and this is what he does, because of his extravagant love. And this isn't some random, out of the blue sacrifice. It has its roots in the Old Testament and the religious practice of the Jewish people to whom Jesus primarily ministered, and who would make an animal sacrifice to atone for their sins. That was part of their worship in the Temple. And so, Jesus came as the final and once for all sacrifice to make us right with God. And that rightness, or righteousness, becomes ours through faith in Jesus.

So, while we often associate Maundy Thursday and the commandment to love with Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet, the ultimate symbols of his power and his love are not the wash basin and the towel, but the bread and

the cup. Jesus' body broken and his blood shed are symbolized in the communion elements, and are the true symbols of the love he has for us.

In a Washington Post article about a month ago, I came across this paragraph about love: “[Today,] the word “love” tends to conjure ideas of flowers, chocolate, declarations of undying devotion. But the term has a longer, more helpful history. Thomas Aquinas, the 13th-century philosopher and theologian, defined love as “willing the good of the other.” He borrowed that definition from Aristotle, who talked about love as an intention to bear goodwill toward another for the sake of that person and not oneself.”

Jesus' death on the cross is the ultimate act of “goodwill toward another for the sake of that person and not oneself.” Jesus embodies love for you and me, and for anyone who would receive that love. And so, he takes the bread and the cup of the Passover meal – which was already a meal that symbolized the freedom that God gave the Israelites as they fled from Egypt...they'd been celebrating it for around 1400 years – he takes those symbols of the freedom God gives, and applies them to himself. And he says that now they represent him: His body broken and his blood shed, an act of love that frees us – not just from earthly powers and for earthly freedom, but including that and beyond it, he frees us from the power of sin so that we might be in relationship with our perfectly holy and heavenly Father, the God of the universe and the God of eternity. He gives us true freedom from not just the symptoms of our sin, but from the very cause itself.

So tonight, and each time we celebrate communion, remember that these are the symbols of love that Jesus gives us. The bread and the cup that we partake of tonight are symbols of his love for you, and if you've received that love and put your trust in Jesus – even if it's right here and now for the very first time – you are invited to commune with him. Please know that perfect faith and perfect living for God are not required: Judas who would betray him and Peter who would deny him, James and John who wanted power with him, and all of the 12 disciples who argued about who was the greatest (even right there that night according to Luke 22:24!)...they were all gathered with him there at the table and Jesus invited them, sinful, imperfect followers, just as they are, to partake in that first “Passover turned Communion” meal. This

is not about being “worthy.” It’s about being loved by God, and through his grace and power being transformed more and more into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ.

And like them, you also are invited, if you are a disciple of Jesus, no matter how imperfect you may be in that discipleship...you’re invited to the table because Jesus’ love includes you as well. So, let’s come to the table and partake of these gifts that symbolize and remind us of the freedom from sin that Jesus offers. He had, and still has, all the power in the universe, and this is what he has done, because he loves us. (Lead right into Communion.)

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/03/17/sex-ethics-rethinking-consent-culture>