

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Exodus 12:1-14a; 1Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-15

As we gather today, we are painfully aware that tonight is the night before the crucifixion. These are no ordinary times. They are marked by a careful preparation for the events to come, a preparation orchestrated by God, working through Jesus in our Gospel reading, to offer the people freedom from sin and death. In the Scripture readings for today, God uses the night before the Exodus and the night before the crucifixion and resurrection for His purposes. He takes over, bringing the people together, ordering what will happen, even offering explanation for why we do what we do. Underlying His concern for what will happen, underlying the details, is the value given to the people He has created. We are His treasures, and He wants us to be safe, and be with Him where we belong.

He treasures the world He has made so much that He sent us his own Son, that we might know the extent of His love for us. He treasures us so much that we are invited to call him "Father," and call Jesus our brother. He treasures us enough that we are invited to consider ourselves family. In churches throughout the world people will gather tonight to remember.

Remembering is not something we spend a lot of time on in our culture. We are occupied with the here and now and the not yet, and we are viewed with suspicion if we spend too much time on recalling the past. Yet, the reading from Exodus today, recalls the foundation of our Eucharistic life, the Passover meal that became the seder, a sacred meal to Jews, a meal which many

Christians rehearse as part of their Holy Week observance. The eating of roasted lamb with bitter herbs and unleavened bread, accompanied by ritual questions and answers recalling the deliverance of the Hebrews from their bondage in Egypt, is a powerful sign of our own spiritual deliverance in the Holy Eucharist. The two events, the Passover meal and the last meal Jesus eats with his disciples, are bound by a chain of memory and meaning, which can empower each of us, and deliver us into a life toward perfect freedom and service. When we reach into the roots of our heritage, we discover our connection with the Passover, the Hebrews, the Jewish tradition, and it becomes the foundation of our story of salvation. We, too, were delivered from the hand of Pharaoh.

Consider some of the elements that are particularly powerful in these events. First is the realization that, wherever we are, in any circumstance, God liberates us. As the Jews prepared to flee they were commanded to eat, and eat well! But God knew that feeding them was not enough, and so God led them with a pillar of fire by night and cloud by day, through the Red Sea and into the Promised Land.

In our journey, the Eucharist feeds our spiritual hunger so that we are ready to draw near to Jesus who leads us on a journey of salvation. Sometimes we are led by others in Jesus and sometimes by the still small voice that keeps gently talking to us. But it is the spiritual food of that Eucharist which nurtures our souls, and frees us from the bondage of sin and death. So, as in any good sacramental event, the physical and the spiritual are combined, symbol and sign, heaven and earth, bread and wine, body and blood. This supper with Jesus is a sign, a memorial, and an actual event in which we "participate in the Lord's death until he comes." The mystery is, that by doing this

action, we are among the community being saved.

We are being saved so we can offer abundance. The Eucharist is not about scarcity, but about the lavish outpouring of Jesus' love for us. Just think: knowing what awful things would befall Him, He could have retreated, saved Himself from the ordeal, retreated from the world. Instead, just before His betrayal and death, Jesus does two remarkable things. He washes the disciples' feet, and He initiates the Supper of Salvation, taking the Passover meal, a memory meal, and turning it into an instrument powerful enough to feed us and free us from sin.

Spiritually, it doesn't get much better than this!

The pouring of the water, the sharing of the bread and cup, are acts of generosity, signs of Jesus love for us. Can we but do the same for others? In the words of the BCP Prayer of Consecration, what can we do except "offer ourselves, our souls and bodies as a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice." In return for what Jesus has done for us in the Eucharistic meal, our response should be as unrestrained and lavish.

Let us give thanks for our Jewish sisters and brothers who honor the origins of this banquet in the Passover feast. Give thanks that Jesus chose it as the venue to reveal Himself in the breaking of the bread. Give thanks that we are bound together in the fellowship of love and prayer, in the Eucharist, with believers throughout the world. Finally, give thanks that Jesus, up to His last moments, gave of Himself in love, and fed us with His own spiritual food, that we might live and serve Him forever.

Despite the tragic events that we will recall and remember tomorrow, this is still God's night. This is His night to prepare us for a life where death is identified not with the end, but as a beginning. He prepares us by commanding us to love one another as He loves us, to see in each other what He sees in us.

Seeing through His eyes allows us to let go of our prejudices, our fears and expect life where we did not know it before.

Seeing through His eyes allows us to die and live again in love, in resurrection. Seeing through His eyes prepares us for tomorrow, for Saturday, for Easter.

So let us allow Jesus into our hearts this night, let Him love us, let Him wash us, let Him feed us, let Him die for us. Allow His eyes to become our eyes, His hands to become our hands, His life to become our lives, that we may know the abundant treasure of His love.

AMEN.