

## Maundy Thursday

The Maundy Thursday service is one of endings and beginnings. What was begun on Ash Wednesday is brought to a close here today. What begins today does not end until the Day of Resurrection.

The theme is love, our Savior's love for us, expressed in the washing of the disciples' feet, in giving himself in bread and wine, in dying upon the cross. An invitation to confession is given. The focus is on forgiveness. On Ash Wednesday, we began Lent with a major act of confession and ashes, but we did not receive a strong statement of forgiveness in the absolution. That bold announcement of forgiveness comes now, "In the mercy of almighty God," and "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," at the service celebrating Christ's love.

The lessons of love are read. A new command derives from it: "Love one another." "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." This self-giving love is demonstrated in the washing of feet. The prayers are said. The table is made ready. The time of the Lord's Supper arrives, and our Lord is revealed in bread and wine as once he "revealed himself to his disciples." It is a solemn moment, but we cannot linger here. Nor could the Lord, for His betrayal was imminent. (adapted from a work by Pr. Thomas L. Weitzel, ELCA).

As much as we all long to be together and share the sacraments this evening, we all know that this is not possible. I have included in your mailing/emails information on how you and your family can share the meal together at this time. I encourage you to partake of the Lord's supper after tonight's service has been completed.

**Opening Song/Reflection:** To See the King of Heaven Fall

**Opening Response:**

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

**C Amen.**

P The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses.

**C Consider my affliction and my trouble and forgive all my sins.**

P As far as the east is from the west,

**C So far does he remove our transgressions from us.**

P If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins

**C And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

P For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.

**C Therefore we give glory to God who raised him up and gave us the promise of salvation. Amen.**

**Confession and Absolution** is spoken responsively by the congregation and the pastor:

P Jesus said, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

**C Forgiving Lord, we confess that we find ourselves cherishing your forgiveness, yet we seek to avoid forgiving those who sin against us. Forgive our need to carry grudges, to count the injuries done to us while failing to see and confess the failings in ourselves. Forgive blindness to the hurts and needs of others while we tend to our own broken promises and broken intentions. Fill us with your heart of compassionate forgiveness and make us those who heal and encourage our loved ones. Fill us with the Spirit so that we might overflow with the serving that proclaims your very presence with us.**

P I have the honor and privilege, by the grace of God, of announcing to you the entire forgiveness of your sins. In Jesus Christ, you are forgiven and free—free to share the steadfast love of God with all.

### **Old Testament Reading, Psalm 116:1-9**

I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live. The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. Then I called on the name of the Lord: "O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul!" Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful. The Lord preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me. Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you. For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling; I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.

### **Epistle Reading, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26**

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when

he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

## **Gospel Reading, Matthew 26:26-29**

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

## **Children's Message:** [faithformationjourneys.blotspot.com](http://faithformationjourneys.blotspot.com)

**Preparation:** Find a crown, or some other object that will make the children think of a classic fairy tale king, and a towel. Put both the crown and towel into a bag with crown on top so you can get it out first, without showing the towel.

**Opening:** Start by reminding the children of the Palm Sunday chant, "Hosanna! Hosanna!" Blessed are those who come in the name of the Lord. Remember that great king we welcomed into Jerusalem on Sunday? Now pull out the crown.

*I was thinking about that king, too, so I brought a crown. What do you think about when you see a crown, or hear about a king? (wait for a few answers – since you are in "church mode" you might get a few answers of "Jesus!" Try to get them to talk about the more fairy tale image of a mighty king.) Yeah, kings are powerful and proud! Do you think a king like that would come to your house and make your bed? Clean your room? What about cleaning your bathroom for you? No, probably not.*

*Well, listen to this, I know a story where a king sat down with his friends, then he washed their feet! No kidding, he got a towel and a bowl of water and washed a bunch of stinky, dirty feet. How would you feel about that? A king washing your feet? Well, by now you've probably figured out that I'm talking about Jesus. That might be even more strange, don't you think? Jesus washing your feet?! I mean, he's God's son, he can do anything, and he chooses to wash a bunch of feet! One of his friends, Simon Peter, feels the same way, he tried to get Jesus to stop, but Jesus says you must let me wash your feet, the smelliest, dirtiest part of you so that you can be really clean. I think Jesus is talking about more than feet here. Jesus cleans out all the bad things that we do, all the stinky parts of our life and forgives and loves us, even when we have stinky feet. Come back on Sunday to hear the rest of the story!*

**Prayer:** Loving God, we thank you for washing away the stinky things that we do, and for forgiving us when we make mistakes. Keep us ever in your love and forgiveness. Amen.

## Message:

Crossroads. They are there for all of us. We may move along from day to day easily, walking in the sunshine, enjoying the view, feeling at peace. And then it comes. A crossroad. A choice point. There we stand, frozen to the spot. Which way now? Right? Left? Straight? What waits down each of those choices? Which way does our heart call us to go? Which makes sense? Which is God's way?

The answers aren't easy. A crossroad can bring daunting spiritual pain. And it can bring us to our knees. It can even bring us to destruction. Or it can bring freedom. Let's listen to the voices of a couple of Jesus' disciples as they remember this night.

The voice of Andrew:

Well, that was a surprise! None of us saw it coming. We all expected the usual celebration! This is the Passover after all. But Jesus never does the expected. Tonight, he has been exceptionally somber. His mood has permeated the entire room! Judas Iscariot just couldn't take it anymore. He jumped up and ran out the door as if he had a fire lit under him. And as for the rest of us.... Well, since Jesus made his big revelation, we've all been staring into our cups, afraid to look the other in the eye. The only one that seems confident is my idiot brother, Simon Peter. But then he doesn't have the sense God gave a goat. Imagine. Trying to walk on water! That turned out to be a complete failure!

I suppose I'm no better. People say of me, "Andrew, was the **first** to follow Jesus!" But in my mind that is not saying much. These past three years I've tried to keep to the background. I have kept my mouth shut for fear of sticking my foot in it, like Peter. In fact the only great thing I've ever done is to bring a young lad with fish and loaves to Jesus. Even then I had my doubts about what Jesus could do with **that** meager offering. Boy, did he astound us all. I'm not much of a servant you see, nor do I possess a great amount of faith. So when Jesus announced one of us would betray him...one of us would deny... well, naturally the question came into my mind. (Long Pause) "Am I the one?" (Pull off a piece of bread and eat it. Take a sip of wine, then go back to position and freeze)

The voice of Matthew:

I can't believe this. I just can't believe this. Three years I've been with Jesus. Three years! Could he possibly think that I.... (Long sigh)

I am Matthew. I'm sure you've heard about me, what with my disreputable past. I made a lot of money before Jesus came along. I was considered one of the best tax collectors in the country! I was despised by all. Even my own family hated me. I didn't care. I collected enough to satisfy the Roman government, and keep some on the side for myself. I was a rich man. I didn't need my family or my former friends. I didn't need anyone! My wealth gave me new friends.

One day Jesus came to me at my tax collector's booth. I felt a shadow fall over me, and I looked up into the most compelling eyes. He simply said "Follow me." I left it all behind. Every bit of it. I became a changed man. My family no longer called me a money-grabbing outcast. Now they said I was crazy! Following a scripture-quoting carpenter from Nazareth. I **am** a different man now. I don't do the things I used to do. I don't even want to do them! (Pause) But, I'm still not sure exactly what he thinks of me. With all these doubts, how could I not question myself?..... Am I the one? (Pull off a piece of bread and eat it. Take a sip of wine, then go back to position and freeze)

The voice of Simon:

When I first met Jesus I was standing on a big boulder yelling at the top of my lungs, (yell) "No king but Messiah! No tax but the Temple! No friend but the Zealot!" I was a brutal man, laying in wait for any Roman citizen that came along so I could (brings fist to hand with a loud crack) .... Well.... I'm sure you get it. The name, Simon the Zealot, was well earned! But Jesus changed my life. Look!! Am I not sitting at the same table as that Jewish tax collector?

Jesus spoke to me of freedom from the oppressor. Of course I assumed that he was speaking of our Roman captors. It wasn't long before I understood he was talking about something quite different, and by then I was so amazed by this man I could never turn around and go back to my former life.

I was the least likely candidate to be chosen for this close circle of believers. Jesus was so gentle, so patient. I was reckless and rash. A danger to all who stood in the way of my beliefs. With a past like that, I can't help but wonder, ..... "Am I the one?" (Pull off a piece of bread and eat it. Take a sip of wine, then go back to position and freeze)

There is no burden like the burden of guilt. There is no spiritual pain like that of something we deeply regret, something we long to have a chance to do over, something that glares with the truth that we have failed.

The disciples struggled with guilt. Peter confronted the truth that he had denied Jesus when the rooster crowed. And he went out and poured his heart out in tears of sorrow. Judas confronted his guilt. When he realized that he had marked Jesus for arrest and saw that Jesus was dragged to trial and condemned, he threw the thirty pieces of silver on the floor of the temple and then went out and hanged himself.

Guilt can destroy. Guilt can put a shroud of pain and darkness over our lives. And worst of all, we cannot wish it or will it away. It hangs there, plaguing our sleep, devastating our days, clouding the spiritual light we seek—dragging us to despair.

We have choices to make – we can carry guilt in our lives when we do wrong or we can make the choice to confront them, to confront our painful acts, or continue to carry them like a

stone in our broken hearts.

Confronting our guilt is not easy. It can be embarrassing to admit our fault. It can be painful to face a person we have hurt. Certainly, Jesus understood the immensity of our guilt when he shared his body and blood on that Thursday evening. He didn't say, "Never mind. Your sins aren't all that bad. I just wave my hand and speak a wish for you and you can feel better about yourselves." God's act of forgiveness is not an act of excusing.

We realize that it was our sin, our guilt that drove Jesus to the cross and we realize that we are forgiven and freed from past sins, not by wishing or hoping, not by anything we can do. It is by trusting in Jesus, receiving his body and blood, that we are helped, that we are healed, that we are forgiven.

And most marvelous of all, that forgiveness permits us the miracle of forgiving ourselves and forgiving others who have hurt us.

That doesn't mean it is easy. When we are hurt, when we are put down, when we are injured by someone else, our heart tells us that we have a right to strike back, to punish the person who has hurt us. But when we make that choice, when we choose to bury the hurt, carry the anger, long for revenge, we hurt ourselves. We are the ones who suffer with that pain. We are the ones who carry the mark.

In Christ's act of love for us, we are forgiven and free. Free from our own guilt and free to forgive others. We are empowered by the Spirit to act, not in anger or revenge, but in love. We are able to forgive as we have been forgiven.

By the power of the Spirit, as we receive the body and blood of Christ for our forgiveness, let's resolve to forgive others. Let's seek reconciliation with someone who has caused us pain, and let's go to the person we have hurt and ask forgiveness. At the crossroad of forgiveness, we are called to act in the forgiveness we have so freely received. Lord, forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us. Amen.

## **Prayers:**

Let us bring our prayers and petitions to God, who hears and answers the pleas of our hearts.

During this Holy Week, Lord, we pray your peace for the nations and peoples of the world and our own nation. Send your Spirit into leaders and rulers. Give them wisdom and a vision of your will for their peoples. We ask your help and comfort for those who must live in places of violence and persecution, especially those who suffer for your name. Strengthen the oppressed; hold the persecuted in your protective hand; send justice to the victims of injustice; and encompass all who cry to you for help with your saving presence. Make us agents of healing in this hurting world. In your mercy,

**C Hear us, Lord.**

P We pray for this congregation and your church in the world. Give faithful leaders so that your church can be a place of healing and reconciliation for all who are broken in spirit. Inspire your followers to take up their crosses of love and service. In your mercy,

**C Hear us, Lord.**

P Ever-present Savior, fill us with the gift of your forgiveness, so that we can carry that forgiveness to all in our world. Give us a spirit of repentance so that we can more fully depend on your gracious gift of forgiveness. Give us the strength to choose the way of open acceptance and reconciliation for all we meet, all who are broken in spirit and burdened by the sins of the past. Lead us to take your healing power to all those around us who cry out for help. Make us able to choose the path of love. In your mercy,

**C Hear us, Lord.**

P We pray for the sick, the suffering, the grieving, the lonely, especially those we name in our hearts. We commit them to your loving care. Heal, help and comfort them according to your will. In your mercy,

**C Hear us, Lord.**

P These and all other petitions and requests we bring before you in the name of Jesus. Let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us:

### **Lord's Prayer:**

Our Father who are in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven  
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen

### **Hymn of the Evening: Go to Dark Gethsemane**

Go to dark Gethsemane,  
All who feel the tempter's power;  
Your Redeemer's conflict see,  
Watch with Him one bitter hour,  
Turn not from His griefs away;  
Turn not from His griefs  
Learn of Jesus Christ to pray.

Follow to the judgment hall,  
View the Lord of life arraigned;  
Oh the wormwood and the gall!  
Oh the pangs His soul sustained!!  
Shun not suffering, shame or loss;  
Learn from Christ to bear the cross

**Blessing:**

Now may the forgiving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal the encompassing love of God  
and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.