

Maundy Thursday 2018

The events of Maundy Thursday are so familiar to us; they can easily become void of meaning. Tonight, I want us to think again about what exactly Jesus might have been doing on that most strange of evenings.

To put it simply, when Jesus feasted with his disciples he was clearly expressing hospitality. That much is obvious. These men are his guests, he has invited them to share what he has. Jesus is their host.

In Jesus' culture, one of the first things a host would do for their guests after they arrived is arrange for their feet to be washed. Guests may have travelled many miles. They would be sweaty, dusty and dirty. So it seems reasonable that one of the many accounts of the feast should include details of how this foot washing was arranged. But this is where cultural normality ceases, in the events of the Last Supper. You see, foot washing was a slave's job. But Jesus inhabits the roles of both host and slave. He washes the feet of his own guests.

A host is lord of the table. He provides the food and drink and his guests defer to him. In his actions at the Last Supper, Jesus proposes a different kind of hospitality, one in which the host is also slave and the slave is also host. Here is something that is neither lordship nor servitude, but a meal of equals.

This does not undermine Jesus' leadership of the group. He doesn't stop being the one who is called to teach them, set their vision and lead them. But his actions at this feast are a symbol of a new kind of relationship amongst men and women. This is a relationship of neither dominance nor subservience but equality in love. He is showing a relationship where we are equal in love to each other, just as Jesus and the Father are equal.

St John has his own reasons for leaving the story there. It is from the other evangelists that we get an insight into other areas of the gathering. They all tell us that Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples, and in so doing, instituted the Eucharist. Though, on the face of it, very different accounts than St John's, the other three evangelists together with St Paul, all point to the same mystery as St John; our new relationship of brother and sister-hood in Christ.

So, let's look at the words Jesus said. We are told that, 'Jesus took bread and said, "THIS is my body given for you"'. In other words, 'if you are looking for my body, this is it.' In this instance Jesus clearly isn't differentiating between physical body and spiritual soul. He is talking about his whole person, complete, his real human being, every piece of it. He is saying, when you look for me, this is where you will find me. This is where you will find my body. Don't look for my body in a tomb. Don't look for my risen body in heaven, don't go looking anywhere, look among yourselves; look at the food you eat together, look at the life you share together. When you break bread together you see exactly what my bodily presence is'.

Of course, all breaking of bread together in friendship at mealtimes conveys a presence of the body of Christ. But in the Eucharistic meal we have something special. The Eucharistic meal is the ultimate in meals, the ultimate in sharing food and life together. We become the one body because we share in the one bread.

Now the Last Supper is undoubtedly a Passover meal. But in his actions, Jesus is announcing a new Passover meal. A new way in which God will save his people from oppression. He is opening the way for a new people of God. The weight of sin which clings so closely, the real oppressor of every individual, is overthrown with this new feast. And

everyone is invited to the banquet. Jesus is announcing the coming of the Kingdom! And in the Kingdom, all are equal.

In every act of love and friendship, we find ourselves in the presence of Christ – every time we feed the hungry, visit the prisoner, shelter the homeless, celebrate with our friends. In the present climate, every time we help those who are isolated, every time we make a phone call to check on someone, every time we check on a neighbour, every time we donate to the foodbank, But at our Eucharistic meal we are, or at least we should be, present one to another, and in the presence of Christ, just as we will be in the kingdom. As we recognise Our Lord in the breaking of bread, we enter for a moment into our promised future, that kind of society in which we are simply the body of Christ. A community in which there will be no admixture of evil or alienation.

Instead of our friendship in Christ being a small chink of light in a world of sin, cruelty, selfishness and power struggles, our friendship in Christ will be everything – it will fashion everything we are and everything around us. We enter into this wonder momentarily in our breaking of the Eucharistic bread, as Our Lord invites us to gaze into this portal of eternity. We are a kingdom people and we gaze into a kingdom of the future.

This kingdom free from all the things that alienates us from each other, calls us to belong. And as our alienation from each other ceases, so does our estrangement from God.

But Jesus did not go to the cross in order to begin a new religious act. He was dragged there and beaten every step of the way, because he was prepared to lay down his life for his friends. Jesus went to the cross to serve us. The blood that trails from the precinct to the executioner's

wood on the hill is not a ritualistic blood. It is the very real blood of a human being. A very real man murdered by the police, the army and the politicians of his day who were defending our right to live without love. Jesus died to show us that we are his friends. He died to show us, that in spite of everything, we remain God's friends.

So this cup that we bless, that we drink and share is for sure a sign of the presence of Jesus, and yet it is so much more. It is a sign of Jesus' blood given for us, a sign of His life laid down for us, his friends. And we remain his friends if we do what he asks; 'to love one another as he has loved us'. This wine that we share is a sign of a new covenant, a new Kingdom, made in the shedding of Christ's blood. A blood that heals us from our sin and overcomes our alienation from God.

This Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, has mercy on us and shows us the way to his peace. So as we pray in our Lord's prayer that God's kingdom comes, we see exactly how that may be. Amen

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