

Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Our three readings this evening all focus on remembering

The Old Testament reading from Exodus looks at the Passover. The central Jewish festival which recalls the nation fleeing from captivity in Egypt and beginning the journey to the promised land. The celebration meal re-enacts the final meal in Egypt, with the youngest family member asking the traditional questions that allow the story to be retold and relived. Questions about the bitter herbs, the salt water, the haroseth paste, the lamb and the unleavened bread. Each element of the meal with an important story to tell.

Every year the exodus is remembered by this celebration, this meal. This act of remembering.

And the New Testament reading is the account of what we know as the Last Supper. Not from a gospel account, but from one of Paul's letters. This fact alone shows how quickly this had become an important act of remembering for Christians.

Jesus takes the bread and wine of the Passover and reinterprets them to tell a new story of God acting to bring freedom from captivity. This time through Jesus' death – the giving up of his body and blood – the world is freed from all evil. Christians in churches throughout the world make this their central act of remembering what Jesus did as he offered himself for us, using those same words that Jesus used that night. And today Maundy Thursday we particularly remember this act – and we will do so later in this service

And then the gospel reading. Not so overtly an act of remembering, but Jesus does say as he washes the feet of his followers "I have set you an example, that you should do as I have done to you". So he expects us to remember his act as we live our lives.

Foot washing – as we most probably know – was the task of the servant, the slave, the lowliest person in the household. It was not a pleasant task. Certainly not a task for rabbis or teachers. But Jesus got down on his hands and knees and washed his followers' feet. What was happening shocked them – in a way that we find it hard to fully comprehend.

The staged foot washing that will take place here shortly just does not and cannot convey that message. But Jesus was setting an example for us to follow.

The difference between this act of remembering and the others – Passover and the last supper - is that we don't remember this act primarily in a festival, but in our lives. In the way we live and treat others. In the ways we are prepared to be servants to those around us, to get involved in the mess and more of serving others.

Passover and Communion seem to focus on what God has done for us in the past. The footwashing probably helps us to look to the future and change the way we live. But maybe the communion could be looked at in this way to – something that's about the future – how we live – rather than simply about remembering the past

The Live Lent – Embracing Justice notes this year – the daily readings on which our Lent Groups were based were thinking about the communion last week. And I read one of those things that is all too glaringly obvious though all too often not seen.

The most obvious thing about Holy Communion – yet perhaps something we rarely reflect on – is how physical it is.

We take bread and wine and we eat and drink. The bread and wine is both food for our spirit in terms of what it signifies, and also food for our bodies in terms of what it is. The words of administration from the old prayer book service reflect this *“The body of Christ which was given for you preserve your body and soul unto everlasting life.; The blood of Christ which was shed for you preserve your body and soul unto everlasting life.”*

The communion is not just concerned with the more spiritual act of remembering, it is also about the physical act of how we live. So I don't think it is merely an coincidence that it was just prior to saying the words we use week by week in our communion services that Jesus got down on his knees and washed feet. The two go together. They are both about the practicalities of life

Taking part in the communion – as we will shortly do – certainly develops and deepens our spiritual life, but it also should be an encouragement and inspiration for our daily lives. For the way we live in this mixed up and messy and sometimes loveless world. It should be an inspiration for us to follow the example of Jesus in service and selflessness. It should enable us (as Paul says in his letter to the Romans) to ‘present our bodies as a living sacrifice, which is our spiritual worship.’”