

Maundy Thursday

Lord Jesus, let us always remember to give you thanks and praise every time we come together and share in the bread and cup. Let us always remember the depth of your commitment to us. Let us never take for granted the price you paid so we might receive the fullness of the grace present in this meal.

The Last Supper/Seder meal was a worship service. It was a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt for the Israelites in ancient times, at the time of Jesus, and still for Jews today. Many Christian churches celebrate a Seder meal on this night along with the Eucharistic service. It remains a celebration of worship and a remembrance for us of that night long ago when Jesus himself, asked us to "Do this in remembrance of me."

An article from the Messianic Jewish Community back in 2016 stated: "The Biblical day begins at sunset. If we follow John's chronology, Yeshua and his disciples were settling into the upper room for his Last Seder as the Jerusalem sunset marked the beginning of the 14th day of the first month. In Exodus 12, the Israelites are commanded to kill the Passover Lamb on the 14th day of the 1st month. That meant that the following afternoon the Passover lambs were to be slaughtered in the Temple. This being so, Yeshua's celebration of the Seder is a day early. He hosts his Last Seder a day early so that he and his disciples can have one last Seder together. When the proper time for the Seder arrives the following evening, Yeshua will already be buried.

The Messianic Jewish community is very interesting since they are Jews that believe in Jesus as Messiah. So, their take on the Last Supper and its significance is striking. They insist that when Jesus said to do this in remembrance of me, he was not just talking about the bread and the wine but of the entire worship experience itself. Of course, Jesus himself becomes the focal point of this worship.

Prior to the Festival of Unleavened bread, all yeast and products containing yeast were to be removed from the household. They were either consumed or given away. The sunset which begins the 15th day of the month is the absolute deadline for removing the leaven. So, when the disciples were sent ahead by Jesus to prepare for the Seder meal, they would have performed this ritual. What is this significance for us?

Paul writes in 1st Corinthians, "Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast--as you really are. For Messiah, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth." (1st Corinthians 5:6-8). We are to search our lives for spiritual leaven as we prepare to come to the Master's table. We search of hearts for morsels of sin and sweep them away. Paul referred to this when he said, "Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup." (1 Corinthians 11:27,28).

Other elements of the Last Supper are also anchored within the rituals of the Passover Seder. The washing of the disciple's feet has a natural compliment in the initial hand washing ceremony of the Seder. The breaking and sharing of unleavened bread as a ritual substitute for a sacrifice comes from the Seder meal. The table prayers and even the hymn sung at the close of the meal are all regular features of the Seder that find expression in the Gospel's telling of the Last Supper. Above all else, this was a cherished meal with friends that Jesus was not about to miss. If we agree that Jesus has asked us to remember him in the entire Eucharistic service and not just the reception of the bread and the wine, many Christians are missing the boat and not following Jesus's instruction.

When I think back to my youth, I now find it incredulous when I remember folks who would literally show up right at the Eucharist, receive communion and then leave. We all know some good people that believe coming to church once a year to fulfill their Easter Duty meets some sort of requirement. Or those who do not feel they need to celebrate the Eucharist because they are spiritual in other ways. Maybe for them that is true but it is not what Jesus asked us to do.

We are meant to worship God together as a family. We are meant to hear and reflect on the word of God. We are meant to pray and to sing songs of praise. We are meant to serve others as Jesus did with the apostles that night. Washing of the feet at the time of Jesus was what a servant was required to do. It was a menial chore and obviously a dirty one.

I would like you to relax and close your eyes if it helps as I ask you to consider these questions.

- What characteristics of Christ most stand out to you based on his washing of the disciples' feet?
- What is the foot washing equivalent in our culture which would communicate these qualities?
- Who is one person whose "feet" God wants you to "wash"? How should you do this?

Maundy Thursday encompasses Prayer, Worship and Blessing. The Way of Love teaches us that Jesus called his disciples to give, forgive, serve, and teach in his name. We are empowered by the Spirit to bless everyone we meet, practicing generosity and compassion, and proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ with hopeful words and selfless actions. Jesus taught us this with washing the feet of his disciples. Our service tonight will end without us being sent forth. After the altar is stripped of all of the ornamentation so to speak, we leave in silence as we carry the consecrated elements out of the church to be placed into the sacristy until tomorrow. These actions not only prepare the sanctuary for the solemnity of Good Friday, but they also exist as an invitation to focus on the center of what is happening—Jesus and the cross. All of this invites us to remember that the Triduum services are part and parcel of one another—they are one, continuous liturgy, telling one continuous story. Maundy Thursday is the first act of the Triduum; the story continues with our re-membering the next day with Good Friday and on Sunday morning with the Easter Celebration. These are Holy events remembered and partaken of by Holy people. And yes, you are Holy People.