**Sermon Maundy Thursday 28/3/24**

Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14, Psalm 116:1,2,12-19, 1 Cor. 11:23-26 7 John 13:1-17, 31b-35

For many hundreds of years Maundy Thursday was the only service in the year when Holy Communion was celebrated after midday. All other services were celebrated in the morning, because it was soon after dawn that the empty tomb was found and for that reason Sunday morning became a weekly resurrection celebration. After almost 2000 years most Christians still worship on Sunday to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus.

The reason why Holy Communion is celebrated in the evening on Maundy Thursday is because it was in the evening at the Passover meal that Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper. More importantly Thursday evening was the night that Jesus was betrayed. It was during this most Holy meal that Judas left Jesus and the disciples to act on an arrangement he had made earlier with the chief priests to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

Another ancient tradition practiced on Maundy Thursday was that penitent people who had been excommunicated were absolved and received back into the church. They would then receive Holy Communion on Easter Sunday. This emphasis on absolution is still practiced in many Maundy Thursday services. Tonight, you will all be given an opportunity to come forward for individual absolution in preparation to receive the body and blood of Christ.

Much of our worship each week is dedicated to remembering. Remembering what God has said to us, what God has promised us, what God has done for us and what God continues to do for us.

This evening once again we come here to remember. As we prepare for the Holy meal this evening our first reading written in Exodus reminds us of God’s great act of deliverance of his people from slavery and genocide in Egypt through the events of the first Passover. This event has been celebrated every year since then. It was certainly celebrated by Jesus throughout his life and became his final meal before his death.

During the Passover celebration psalms 113-118 are sung. These are known as Hallel or praise psalms because they praise God for his great acts of deliverance, of which Passover is one of the greatest. Tonight, we will read psalm 116 which reminds us that God turns his ear to us and listens when we call on him. It reminds us that God saves us as we read the words: *“I will life up the cup of salvation”* (vs 13, NIV).

Some people believe that the cup of salvation, the third of four cups of wine used in the Passover celebration may have been the cup Jesus gave to his disciples after the supper, when he said the words, *“This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”* Psalm 116 also reminds us that because of God’s saving acts we naturally respond with praise, thanks, and service.

Tonight, we also remember the institution of the Lord’s supper on the night Jesus was betrayed. We remember that, in with and under the bread, we receive Christ’s body given for us and in the wine, we receive Christ’s blood shed for us. The Lord’s supper always points us to God’s greatest act of redemption, the death of God’s one and only Son on the cross. Tonight, as we receive the body and blood of Christ, we remember, and we proclaim by our actions the Lord’s death until he comes.

Tonight, we also remember that worship is not about us serving God, but worship is where God serves us. As we read John’s account of the Gospel, we are reminded that Jesus did not come to be served but rather to serve all of humanity.

An enduring vision of the God who serves us is described as we hear these words:

*“[Jesus] got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel round his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped round him.” (John 13:4,5, NIV).*

It can be hard to imagine that God would intentionally turn his ear to us and listen intently to every word of every prayer. It is even harder to imagine that God would come down from heaven, become a human being and live among us. It is almost impossible to imagine that God would take on the role of a servant, a slave no less, get on his knees and serve us.

God serving us? That is not supposed to happen. That is not what most people think when they think about God. After all, in most people’s minds there is a hierarchy and God is at the top and we are way below God. In most people’s minds there is something wrong with God our Lord and Creator serving us human beings. Peter can’t imagine being served by his Lord and he says so. “*No, you shall never wash my feet.”* (see John 13:8).

Peter discovers there is no choice. If Peter won’t let Jesus serve him, then he and Jesus can’t have anything to do with each other. To be a disciple of Jesus is to accept Jesus serving you. To accept you can’t do anything to prove yourself to God, to be accepted by God or to win God’s favour. If you think you have to do something, then you have got the wrong idea about God’s fundamental character because God is Love and all that love wants to do is serve.

This evening we remember God, who listens, who saves and redeems, and who serves. This evening once again God speaks to us, forgives, and redeems us, listens to us, and serves us with the body and blood of Christ for forgiveness of sins, and strengthening in faith and love. As God serves us with God’s good, precious, bountiful gifts, the only thing left for us to do is respond. That is the pattern of our worship and of our life. God serves us and we respond. We respond with hallelujahs, and we respond by loving God and neighbour because God first loved us.

Amen

Pastor Rolf Lungwitz