

HIS MODEL, HIS MEAL, AND HIS MESSAGE

MAUNDY THURSDAY, MARCH 29, 2018

Tonight, we look back in remembrance on the night when Jesus celebrated His final Passover along with His disciples. Most notably during this Passover meal, Jesus modeled humility by washing the feet of His disciples. After doing so, He gave the disciples a new command in His message to them “to love one another as He has loved them.” We remember this Thursday as “Maundy” because the word represents the mandate or command to which He has called us. On this night, His disciples are invited to share a meal of communion with Him that has become known to us as the Lord’s Supper. So when we look in remembrance this evening, we look to the mandate Christ has given us – in His deeds and in His words. Christ provides us with an example of His expectations for us as disciples through His model, through His meal and through His message.

As I think of the model, the meal and the message from Christ, I cannot help but reflect on the many Passover meals, known as Pesach or the Festival of the Pascal Lamb, I spent with my family as a Jew. As we read the Haggadah, a narrative of the Exodus, during the Family Seder, we remembered together the story of the Jewish people and their deliverance from Egypt. We gave thanks over bread and wine at the beginning of the meal. As we retold the story each year, we would revisit how Passover was a holiday instituted by God himself through Moses and Aaron. The Seder table and its symbols each represent elements of the story and pointed to the hope for the arrival of our Messiah.

Each year at our gathering, we would spend hours preparing the meal at my aunt’s home and waiting for everyone to gather that evening in eager anticipation that Elijah might return and bring hope of the coming Messiah and the Messianic age. One year, when my daughters were around 7 and 8 years old, my Aunt asked if they would help with the hand washing and pour the wine for all those at the table to begin the meal. We had always made it a tradition to involve the children in as much of the service and meal as possible.

My daughters were being raised to learn both the Jewish and Christian faith traditions during this early time in their lives. As young girls they went each Sunday to services with Debi learning about Jesus. When the time came to fill the wine glasses, they went from adult to adult saying “the blood of Christ” to much laughter and jokes that Elijah must really be coming this night. Little did I know that the Lord was already very much at work to draw me into an understanding that the Messiah had in fact already come.

Having grown up participating in the Festival of Passover as a commemorative meal, I also see our partaking in the Lord’s Supper as a memorial supper. In its fullness, the Lord’s Supper is a meal where we recall Christ’s death and His becoming the Paschal Lamb sacrificed for our sin. We join in communion with His Holy presence in full remembrance of all He has done.

As Passover commemorated God's act of redeeming the Jewish people so the Lord's Supper commemorates Jesus' act of redemption for all of us. We are called to acknowledge and give testimony to the triumphant work of the Cross.

In the Old Testament, atonement for sin was practiced repeatedly by the blood of animals offered by men; but in the New Testament, sin has been atoned once and for all by the shedding of the blood from Christ. As he said, "in remembrance of Me," Jesus transformed the third cup of the Passover into the cup of remembrance of His offering.

The Lord's Supper not only looks back at Christ's sacrifice and gives Him praise for His great gift of salvation to us, but it also looks ahead to our ongoing process of spiritual growth and sanctification as we head towards the day when we will see Him again and enjoy our heavenly home with Him forever.

Tonight, may we remember the Passover in Egypt, the night before the sun arose on the children of Israel and they walked through blood-stained doorways into freedom and a restored life as God's people. This is the paschal night, the night of the remembrance meal—the hard, unleavened bread, the bitter herbs, the lamb roasted to dry toughness. The lamb's blood painted on the doorposts. It is the night of judgment and death as God seeks out the blood. Under the blood of the lamb, you are safe. Death passes over. Without the blood you are dead.

God gave us this night of remembrance. ¹⁴ "This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance." (Exodus 12:14, NIV84). Through Jesus, God unified us all as disciples in this meal together. In our communion meal, we remember the Lord and His saving work; and the Lord washes over us with His love. We remember who we are and who God is, and in remembering, our identity is visible in what we eat and what we drink. We join together in solidarity with the Pesach tradition of generations past. We join together in a holy communion of a holy community as the Paschal Lamb shines forth through Christ himself.

Reflecting tonight on Christ's Passover Feast, we are given a glimpse of Jesus as He reclines at the head of a table with His disciples, His Twelve, His Israel. It is the Lord's Passover. At this table, Jesus models for His disciples in two ways. First, He models for the disciples a living example of humble service. He washes their feet. The Lord, Creator of all, bends down to do the work of the lowest servant. The Master becomes the slave. He came not to be served, but to serve, and to lay down His life as a ransom for the many.

During this intimate meal with his disciples, Jesus modeled for them a lesson about humility. Normally, slaves performed the act of washing the feet of dinner guests. Here Jesus, the guest of honor, dressed himself like a slave, with a towel around his waist, and insisted on washing the feet of his disciples.

As they walked to the home with the upper room, the roads covered their feet in dirt. In the homes of the wealthy, those entering to share a meal would have their feet washed by the servants of the house. As the disciples gathered with Jesus, they would not have had the privileges shown to the wealthy. However, they would still begin the meal with a washing of their hands using a basin and towel.

Jesus' action was during the meal, not upon arrival, and was done deliberately to emphasize a point. Jesus makes use of the basin and towel to serve them by pouring water over their feet and into the basin. It was a lesson in humility, but it also set forth the principle of selfless service that was soon to be shown more fully by giving His life on the cross.

A few years ago, I was blessed to serve with a short-term mission team in Nicaragua. We were going to the village of Los Banderos (The Flags). During our time there, we would build a church, engage in a VBS with the children and share God's Word through daily discipleship with the women. One day, we were teaching about communion and reading the verses from John 13. The HS girls on the team asked if they could demonstrate their love for the women of the village by washing their feet after they read the passage together. I promise you the feet of these women were as dirty as the disciples feet the night of the Passover.

I watched in awe as these young girls without hesitation knelt before each woman in the circle and began washing their feet. Each woman was then given a new Bible and new pair of shoes following the foot washing. Tears flowed as the women were overwhelmed feeling the love of Christ wash over them and the girls from our team felt God's presence and joy in the love they showed, crying right alongside them.

Many of the women tried to refuse the washing as Peter did. "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Peter, with his usual impulsiveness, objected to Jesus' action of washing his feet. He could not understand the humility of Christ. Pride gets in the way for all of us just as it did for Peter as He was being served by the Master. Our ego gets in the way of allowing others to serve us in the name of Christ. The young girls would not take no for an answer, repeating similar words as when Christ answered Peter, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with Jesus."

Jesus' reply looks beyond the incident to what it symbolizes: Peter needed a spiritual cleansing. The external washing was a picture of cleansing from the sin within. Jesus, ever patient, ever lowly, gently persists in His giving: "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." (John 13:8). Peter must learn the way of receiving, the way of faith, the way of Baptism. Before you can give of yourself in service, you must receive the Lord's service. He must wash you before you can wash others.

In washing the disciples' feet, Jesus models a pattern for serving others and gives a meaningful message "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." (John 13:15 NIV84) The humility of Christ is a pattern for His disciples. Instead of aspiring to dominate,

they must be eager to serve. This is what it means to live under Him in His kingdom and to serve Him. This King bows before His subjects and washes their feet. So also the disciples must do with those they serve. "I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him." (John 13:16 NIV84)

As the Passover and His sacrifice on the Cross approached, Jesus took every opportunity to teach His disciples about what He was about to accomplish and how they were to proceed after He was resurrected. In one of the most humbling and beautiful displays of servant leadership, the Lord knelt and began to cleanse the disciples' feet—a task reserved for the lowliest slave in the house. As believers, we are to be humble as our Savior is—in love, we gently lead others to the Cross, where they can be washed clean of all their sins.

After he models humility, Jesus speaks to the sacrifice that is to come using the symbol of sacrifice and affliction that comes with the Passover meal. He takes the bread of the Passover meal, the matzo, the hard, unleavened bread of affliction, that the Israelites ate on the fateful night of freedom. He gives thanks, and breaks it into pieces, and hands a piece to each of His disciples. The broken bread grants them an understanding of what is to come.

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ 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." (1 Corinthians 11:23–24 NIV84)

His words tell what we could not know for ourselves by our own reason and our own senses. This bread is Jesus' sacrificial body, what would later that day be given into death on the cross. Here, the bread finds its highest and holiest use in divine service to deliver Jesus' body to our bodies, the bread of life, living bread come down from heaven as manna to feed His people.

²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." (1 Corinthians 11:25 NIV84)

The blood of the new covenant is given to drink as wine. Here wine finds its ultimate purpose, delivering Jesus' blood to the disciples' lips, binding those who drink of His cup in a blood covenant. Blood gives life. ¹¹ *For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.* (Leviticus 17:11 NIV84)

This blood of the new covenant is the blood that was poured out for you, in your place, for the forgiveness of your sins. Where the blood of the Lamb flows, death passes over. This is the food of immortality. ²⁶ *For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.* (1 Corinthians 11:25–26 NIV84)

To eat the body of Christ and to drink His blood calls to mind all that He is and all that He has done for you—His incarnation, His life, His death, His resurrection and ascension. This is how

Jesus wishes to be remembered, by receiving the fruits of His cross as our food and our drink. This is also how He draw us into communion with Him. We are one body and one blood together with Him, and He will not deny His body and blood. This food of remembrance marks us, just as Baptism marked us. We are redeemed by Christ, the Crucified One. We carry these tokens with us as a remembrance of who we are and who God is for us. We take Jesus' body and blood into our lives and into our death, and He unites us with Him. Through Him, we are forgiven and raised.

Washing feet was Jesus' example, something the disciples could do for one another. But giving His body to eat and His blood to drink—that was something only Jesus could do for them. He unites them with Him in His death and life. He the Vine; they the branches. His body and blood, His death and life, flowing into them, making them fruitful foot washers. Apart from Him, they can do nothing. Nor can we.

Jesus has given them a model to follow, a meal to partake, and now he closes the supper with a message to embrace, a command to fulfill: ³⁴ *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.* ³⁵ *By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* (John 13:34–35 NIV84)

He shows us that knowing and doing are two separate things, both must be happen for us to be his disciples. Jesus offers His blessing not merely for those who know His will, but for those who do it as well. Genuine faith always leads to godly action, and we know that whatever He leads us to do for His name's sake, He will use powerfully for His glory, even if we can't yet see how.

He gives His all to us, you and me, serving as our Savior and Lord. Nothing stands outside His forgiveness. Nothing can separate us from His giving and sacrificial love. No greater love is there than this servant love that lays down His life for another. In His Supper, at His table, He lays before us the gifts of His cross and says, "Do this in remembrance of Me."

And from His model, His meal, His message, we can arise refreshed, renewed, restored—in faith toward Him and in fervent love toward one another. Faith trusts in Christ alone; love bends down in service of the neighbor—both friend and stranger. Faith receives Jesus' service; love seeks to serve Him in the least, the lost, the lowly of this world. Faith receives the washing of sin; love washes the feet of a fellow sinner. Faith remembers His love; love remembers His service. Let us pray...

For Your becoming the Servant of all, for Your washing the disciples' feet, for the gift of Your body and blood, for our remembrance of You and Your remembrance of us, we give You thanks and praise, most holy Jesus. Amen.

John 13:1–17, 31b–35 (NIV84)

¹ It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. ² The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.

⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

⁸ "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." ⁹ "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" ¹⁰

Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. ¹²

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. ¹³ "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

³² If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. ³³ "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. ³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

1 Corinthians 11:23–26 (NIV84)

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In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Exodus 12:1–14 (NIV84)

¹ The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, ² “This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. ³ Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. ⁴ If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. ⁵

The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. ⁶ Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. ⁷ Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. ⁸ That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. ⁹ Do not eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but roast it over the fire—head, legs and inner parts. ¹⁰ Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. ¹¹ This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord’s Passover.

¹² “On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. ¹³ The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt. ¹⁴ “This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance.