



This is the night when Jesus gathered together his disciples, those who were close to him, to share in the Passover meal.

Pause for a moment to pray for those who are close to you, but who cannot be with you this night. Remember that God is with us, with all who are close to us.

Let us hold before God his church, dispersed, yet together in worship.

Let us keep a moment of silence together.

On this night, our Lord Jesus said:
'A new commandment I give to you,
that you love each other, as I have loved you.'

Let us pray.

Gracious God, we give you thanks for the opportunity we have once more to follow the events of Holy Week. To remember those precious times that Jesus spent with his disciples, still teaching them, still showing them what was about to happen.

We thank you that, although we are not physically together as your church tonight, we can still follow these events and turn them from a historical story into a living tradition, as we hear once more that great command, 'Love each other as I have loved you.'

Gracious God, the love that you showed us in and through Jesus Christ is so great that we wonder if we can ever live out this command. Yet, we are deeply thankful that you give to us the help of your Holy Spirit, to love those who are close to us, and to help us love those we find difficult to love.

Lord God, help us this night to remember the hospitality of the Passover meal and the generosity of your love, and may that same love overflow in our lives today.

Amen.

Luke 22:7-23 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Preparation of the Passover

⁷ Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.

⁸ So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it." ⁹ They asked him, "Where do you want us to make preparations for it?"

¹⁰ "Listen," he said to them, "when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters ¹¹ and say to the owner of the house, 'The teacher asks you, "Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" ¹² He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there." ¹³ So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

The Institution of the Lord's Supper

¹⁴ When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; ¹⁶ for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; ¹⁸ for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹ Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. ²¹ But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. ²² For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!" ²³ Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this.

Reflection

I wonder what strikes you most from reading again this familiar story. Each year we return to it, each Communion Service holds some of it, and yet it is something that never runs dry. This is a living story and we are part of a living

faith, a living tradition that is as real today as these events were for Jesus and the disciples all those years ago.

Sometimes we wonder why we keep the tradition of services of Holy Communion as we do. For some they are deeply meaningful encounters with God, for others it seems a somewhat bizarre and out of date practice. Yet maybe we forget that the Passover meal was just as much a tradition for the Jews, and that Jesus kept this tradition. For, like our Communion Services it was not just a remembrance of their history, it was a living story of which they were a part and Jesus was part of this story too.

We keep our services of Holy Communion in the same kind of way. It is more than mere tradition, it is part of our living faith journey today. It connects us with the living story of Jesus and of course, the phrase, 'Do this in remembrance of me' is a command we keep to this day.

When we read about the preparation of the Passover, it always amazes me that there seems to be an element of Jesus and the disciples inviting themselves to somebody's house to celebrate Passover. At the same time of course, we can read it as an example of how God provides.

In these recent days of social isolation, it has amazed government how many people have volunteered to help the NHS or how many people are prepared to go the extra mile for the sake of their community. To me none of this has been a surprise. What we learn from the very beginning is that God created humanity to be social. We are created to live in community and not isolation. So all this community spirit simply underlines the fact we are not made to be isolated, this is not how God intended us to live.

It seems almost a small aside, but I have wished the phrase "Social Distancing" was replaced with "Physical Distancing" from the start, as it seems to me that people have found other ways to come together. Physical precautions are being taken, but socially people continue to connect and look out for one another.

Finally, even in this close Passover gathering there was one who would betray Jesus, but even he was welcome at this meal.

Each of us will approach any service of Holy Communion with any number of things going on in our minds, any number of emotions swirling around. But Jesus was happy that Judas was part of this meal, he was to be included.

It reminds me of the prayer we sometimes use before we receive the bread and wine:

"Lord, we come to your table, trusting in your mercy and not in any goodness of our own. We are not worthy even to gather up the crumbs under your table, but it is your nature always to have mercy and on that we depend. So feed us with the body and blood of Jesus Christ your Son, that we may for ever live in him and he in us. Amen."

All are welcome and all are invited by Jesus to share in these meals, no matter what is going on in our hearts and minds. Judas was clearly very conflicted. Many of the others were quick to say that they would never betray Jesus – but then, despite their very good intentions, even Peter denied Jesus – and more than once!

Despite knowing all that was ahead of him, Jesus continued because of his love for us.

As the meal came to an end, the story does not.

One of the most moving things about Maundy Thursday services in church is the real difficulty we have in leaving in silence. But we do because we know all that is about to follow.

What started as a meal to celebrate the Passover, became a meal that started a much more sober course of events.

I first came across this hymn a few years ago. It is one that pulls no punches about the solemnity or power of this night, but still holds out the hope of Easter Day. It is set to the tune Intercessor and the original text was by Peter Abélard (1079-1142).

This is the night, dear friends, the night for weeping,
when powers of darkness overcome the day,
the night the faithful mourn the weight of evil
whereby our sins the Son of Man betray.

This night the traitor, wolf within the sheepfold,
betrays himself into his victim's will;
the Lamb of God for our sacrifice preparing,
sin brings about the cure for sin's own ill.

This night Christ institutes his holy supper,
blest food and drink for heart and soul and
mind;
this night injustice joins its hand to treason's,
and buys the ransom-price of humankind.

This night the Lord by slaves shall be arrested,
he who destroys our slavery to sin;
accused of crime, to criminals be given,
that judgement on the righteous Judge begin.

O make us sharers, Saviour of your Passion,
that we may share your glory that shall be;
let us pass through these three dark nights of
sorrow
to Easter's laughter and its liberty.

Let us pray.

Lord God, on this night, the night on which
your son Jesus was betrayed, we commit
ourselves to follow the example of love and
service which Jesus showed us.

On this night Jesus prayed for his disciples to
be one. So we pray for the unity of your
Church all over the world. May we be one in
mission and service.

Lord, hear us.
Lord unite us.

On this night, Jesus prayed for those who
were to believe in him. So we pray that in
these strange times of isolation, we may still
join in your mission to this world.

Lord, hear us.
Lord, renew our zeal.

On this night, Jesus commanded his disciples
to love, but suffered rejection himself. So we
pray for those who are rejected, unloved, and
feel at the bottom of the heap – that no one is
interested in them.

Lord, hear us.
Lord, fill us with your love.

On this night, Jesus reminded his disciples
that if the world hated them it first hated him.
We pray for those who are ridiculed and
persecuted for their faith.

Lord, hear us.
Lord, increase our faith.

On this night, Jesus told his disciples that he
was going to prepare a place for them.
We remember in your presence all who have
died, those who have been bereaved and
those unable to be present at funeral services
and committals who are finding this time so
very hard.

Lord, hear us.
Lord, renew our hope and trust in you.

For, Lord, we make these and all our prayers
in the name of Jesus who taught us when we
pray to say:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

When the disciples had sung a hymn
they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus prayed to his Father:

'If it is possible,
take this cup of suffering from me;
yet not my will but yours be done.'

Christ was obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross.

Keep a moment of silence.

AFTER GIVING THANKS,
HE BROKE BREAD
AND SAID,

“This is my body,
which is for you;

DO THIS IN
REMEMBRANCE
OF ME.”

