

Resources for Maundy Thursday

Thursday 17 April 2025

Lectionary Readings (*depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on*)

Exodus 12.1-4[5-10], 11-14; Psalm 116.1,10-17; 1 Corinthians 11.23-26; John 13.1-17,31b-35

Homily

Today's homily has been written by Sue Nelms, Bishop's Advisor for Disability and LLM, The Lordsbridge Team (Benefice)

We have arrived at Maundy Thursday. When I was growing up it always felt like a sad day, but I could never really explain why. It was just a feeling. Possibly it was the natural coming down from the joy of Palm Sunday before the lead into Good Friday or Black Friday as it was sometimes called in my part of the world. We were recently introduced to the practice in some churches of removing the vestments and altar dressing after a Maundy Thursday foot-washing service, which I found extremely powerful and moving. I was still none the wiser about the origins of the word Maundy, however.

It seems that Maundy comes from the old French word 'mande' which in its turn came from the Latin word 'mandatum' meaning mandate or commandment, used notably later on in chapter 13 of John's gospel, 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another' (Jn 13.34-35). 'Mandatum novum', a new commandment. In our Diocese we celebrate the 'Chrism' service on Maundy Thursday in the Cathedral which gives us the opportunity and space to reflect on this. At this service, all Christians are given the opportunity to renew their baptismal promises and reaffirm their ministry both individually and collectively. Anointing is offered and Clergy also have the opportunity to receive fresh supplies of the oils used for anointing.

In today's gospel reading, John paints a solemn picture. Jesus knew that the time for his death was approaching. He loved his disciples. As John poignantly writes, 'he loved them to the end' (v1). However, the devil who had left Jesus at the end of the temptations in the wilderness to wait for an opportune moment (Luke 4.13) had now found that opportune moment and sowed the seed of betrayal in the heart of Judas Iscariot. Jesus knew this had happened, but he also knew that God had given all things into his hands and whilst he could have acted to exclude Judas from events, he didn't. He showed Judas the same love as he showed the other disciples.

The lesson on that last evening together was one in true humility. Jesus quietly took on the role of a servant in order to wash the feet of his guests, the disciples. Ordinarily no self-respecting man would have humbled himself and washed someone else's feet; that was for servants or slaves to do. However, Jesus was the servant king, the Messiah who came to serve his people, turning the world upside down. How often have we seen a person in power move to serve the lowest in society? A king washing the feet of the poorest person in their kingdom? In Luke's gospel Jesus challenged with the question 'who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves' (Luke 22.27).

Not entirely surprisingly, the disciples did not understand what was happening; Simon Peter jumped up saying that Jesus would never wash his feet (v6). In Simon Peter's mind Jesus was the Messiah, but Simon Peter's perception of the Messiah was not the same as Jesus's, and Jesus understood this. You can hear kindness and love in his reply to Simon Peter 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me' and the mad, deep love that Simon Peter shows for Jesus in his reply 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' Simon Peter wants to be immersed in Jesus, but Jesus gently explains that such steps are not necessary, just his feet will do. The rest of him is already both metaphorically and physically clean but his feet have become dusty because of contact with the road.

This gives Jesus the opportunity to share with them all, that not all of the disciples are wholly clean. The heart of Judas was not clean. Jesus knows this even though Judas has said nothing to him. Jesus doesn't betray him at this point. Jesus continues to offer Judas everything, not only the foot washing but all the blessings and more that he offers the other disciples. Perhaps Judas thinks Jesus is bluffing when he says that one of them will betray him? After all, Jesus couldn't see what was in Judas's heart, could he? Yes, he could, but despite that, he simply continued to give Judas the same love as any other disciple.

This is challenging. Jesus was showing his disciples unconditional, all-embracing love despite knowing what was going to happen to him in the form of betrayal by one of his own friends. I wonder how many of us can always offer such unconditional love, or do we sometimes expect something back – gratitude, good behaviour, love in return? We may have good intentions but sometimes we can't manage it, particularly if we believe that the other person is going to betray us or abuse our love. We see this happening all the time around us.

After the foot washing Jesus again talked about the upcoming betrayal and said that the betrayer would be the person, he would give bread to; an interesting image as the eucharist involves a bread element. Judas chose to accept the bread from Jesus and left the gathering at that point. However, his departure does not take away from the love Jesus showed him by including him whole-heartedly in the washing of feet. The giving without judgement, the opportunity to be included in the receiving of the new commandment to love as Jesus loved, even though Jesus knew the betrayal that was coming. That is what it means to love as he loved us. This is what he meant by his commandment to love others as he loved us. It

won't be easy. I am sure that it wasn't easy for Jesus either but still he loved, even to the end. Amen.

Ways to Engage all Generations

When different generations are gathered together in worship there is an opportunity to build relationships and to encounter God in our conversations as we build relationships and learn from each other no matter what our ages, stage of life or faith and for all present to feel included. Adding some wondering questions to the service at an appropriate moment can help to do this.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder what your favourite part of the story/passage is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder who your favourite character is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder how _____ felt or I wonder how _____ felt when _____ happened?
- I wonder how you feel about _____?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?
- I wonder what the [tree, pearl, coin] could really be?
- I wonder why _____ said _____?
- I wonder what we can learn about God in this story?

Suggested intercessions

Lord, we thank you today that Jesus humbled himself and washed the feet of his disciples. We thank you that they humbled themselves and rejoiced in that washing, the cleansing that it offered. We thank you for all people who serve you today by the washing of those around them and the gift they offer of love and care; carers, both paid and unpaid, medical staff and anyone who reaches out to serve those around them. Bless them and support them in their work.

Lord hear us. **Lord graciously hear us.**

Lord we pray for all people who serve you. We pray for wisdom and honesty for world leaders and people in authority who make decisions that affect the lives of so many people. We pray for the people they serve, that they will work with those in positions of authority to protect and nurture the wonderful world you created. You gave us an abundant world and we pray that we will share the gifts you have given us with our neighbours, wherever they may be, loving them as we love ourselves.

Lord hear us. **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for our Church as it faces up to the challenges of our world. We pray for forgiveness where forgiveness is due. We pray for love for our neighbours. We pray for all who serve, whether ordained or lay, up front or behind the scenes. We pray for Bishop Dagmar and all who work with her during the search for a new Bishop of Ely and we pray for the Church of England as we search for a new Archbishop of Canterbury. As Jesus faced the huge challenges of his final few days on earth and lived through them to glorify the name of God, we pray that our Church will also glorify God by its actions.

Lord hear us. **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for all people going through difficult times. We may not experience the journey and the pain that Jesus experienced, but we all experience challenges, some of which may feel overwhelming. As Jesus knew you were with him, we pray that we will know your presence in our lives, your company alongside us, your arms around us, your love with us. Comfort people in pain, whether physical, mental or spiritual. Make their voices heard when they feel invisible. Help those with no understanding of their challenges to learn from them.

Lord hear us. **Lord graciously hear us.**

As Jesus faced up to his forthcoming death on the cross, we pray for everyone either facing their final days of life or who have recently died. We pray that they may rest in peace in your loving arms and that you will comfort the friends and family who are left behind in their grief. As a loving father, you know the pain of experiencing the death, particularly the death of a child, so you understand our pain. As we look towards the joy of Jesus's resurrection on Easter Day, we pray that those who mourn will also, in time, be able to share in the joy of God's kingdom.

Lord hear us. **Lord graciously hear us.**

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your son, our saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Suggested hymns/songs

An upper room did our Lord prepare

Thanks for the fellowship found at this meal

This is my body, broken for you

Jesus took a piece of bread, he shared a cup of wine

I am the bread of life

Gather around for the table is spread

Bread is blessed and broken

Brother, sister, let me serve you

I heard the voice of Jesus calling

Bread of Heaven on thee we feed

Activities to accompany the service

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- reflectionary.org – lectionary-based resources
- engageworship – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@ lectionary resource)