

# Maundy Thursday – The Cup of Salvation

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Maundy Thursday – Ex 12, Ps 116, 1 Cor 11 Jn 13

Tonight, we've heard again how four of our ancient, sacred traditions began – *the Feast of the Passover*, the *Lord's Supper*, the Christian principle of *Servant Leadership* – shown by washing each other's feet, and the *New Commandment* – to love each other like Jesus loves us.

From Exodus, we heard the story of the first Passover – the final rescue of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt began with a meal where people ate standing up and dressed for travel – ready to flee at a moment's notice. It's called *Passover* for a strange reason. Before this meal, each household had to sacrifice a perfect, unblemished lamb and roast it over a fire. They had to daub their front door frames with blood from this lamb. The blood would be a sign to protect the household. God was sending the angel of death on Egypt to kill all the first-born in every household. But if the front door frame of a house was marked with the blood of a lamb, the angel of death would *pass over* without killing anyone within it. A short time later, the Hebrew people were delivered from slavery through the Red Sea.

The Church calls us to read this story tonight because it connects with our Christian story. Our Christian story tells of the blood of a perfect *man* being the means of our rescue from slavery. We remember this every week at Holy Communion.

Passover meals are happening this week. Jewish people celebrate their rescue and thank God. They drink three cups of wine at this feast: the cup of *sanctification* celebrates the special bond they have with God; the cup of *praise* celebrates

God rescuing them from captivity; and the cup of *redemption* celebrates God redeeming them so they are no longer slaves.

In this evening's Psalm, we read about another cup; the cup of *salvation*. The Psalmist wants to offer it as a new sacrifice – a sacrifice of thanksgiving, offered by someone who knows freedom in God.

Paul's letter links the imagery of Exodus and the Psalm as he describes the Last Supper that Jesus shared with his disciples. Jesus is the sacrificial lamb and his blood is our protection. And Paul also names the fourth cup of *salvation*, which proclaims the Lord's death until he comes.

Into this mix, the Church also gives us John's story of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. It also happened at a meal – but not at the meal we might first think of. The meal where Jesus shared the Last Supper with his disciples in Mt <sup>26:26-29</sup>; Mk <sup>14:22-25</sup> and Lk <sup>22:7-20</sup> was the Passover meal. But in John's gospel the meal where Jesus washed his disciples' feet happened *before* the Feast of the Passover <sup>13.1</sup>.

In John's Gospel Jesus will die on the day of preparation for Passover <sup>19:31</sup>. That's the time when Passover sacrifices began in the temple. So in this Gospel, *Jesus* is the sacrificial lamb—the Paschal Lamb—the Passover Lamb—the Lamb of God who takes away the sins – not only of Israel, but of the world. This is the same as Paul's understanding; that Jesus' blood will save us.

But Jesus adds something new to all this. During the meal, he takes off his outer robe and, clothed only in a loincloth, he ties a towel around his waist. Thus dressed as a slave, he washes his disciples' feet. And afterwards he says, “... *if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.*”

So Christian ministry is defined for all of us: the Christian is always a servant, and service is always given for love. It's summed up in the New Commandment. We care for others like Jesus does *as a sign to all people*. It's the reason God's people were freed from slavery in Egypt, and it's the reason we've been set free from slavery to futility and despair. We are set free to give hope; set free so we can tell people that God loves them. And we are to show them that by serving them and serving each other in love. *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*

This night, we remember Jesus' blood; we drink it in the Eucharist; *Jesus'* blood offered to protect us and all the world from the angel of death. We are given a picture of Jesus as the lamb who gave himself to be sacrificed for us; to free us from slavery; to lead us into a community of freedom and love; to build us up into a people set free to shine in the world's night, like a bonfire of hope burning on a mountaintop, guiding lost travellers to hope, to safety, to welcome, to love – to Jesus. Amen.