

Maundy Thursday: The servant leader

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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 as 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 there. A short time later, the Hebrew people were delivered from slavery through the Red Sea.

We've read this story tonight because it connects with our Christian story. Ours tells of the blood of a perfect *man* willingly offered being the means of our rescue from slavery to death. We remember this every week at Holy Communion.

Passover meals are happening this week too. Jewish people celebrate their rescue from slavery 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. *Sanctification, praise and redemption*; they are all themes of the three days we embark on this evening.

In this evening's Psalm, we read about yet 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 the freedom of belonging to God.

Paul links the imagery of Exodus and the Psalm to describe the Last Supper that Jesus shared with his disciples. For him, Jesus is the sacrificial lamb and his blood is our protection. And Paul claims fourth cup – salvation – for remembrance of the death which was its price, and the hope which is ours: at communion, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

In the Gospel Jesus adds something else – our relationship with each other. During the meal, he takes off his outer robe. Now, clothed only in a loincloth, he ties a towel around his waist. So he's dressed as a slave, and he takes on a slave's role; he washes everyone's feet. Then 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.*"

This is the definitive picture of Christian ministry: the leader is always a servant, and service is always given as a sign of love. It's also definitive of Christian relationships. It's summed up in the New Commandment. We care for others like Jesus does *as a sign to all people*. This is why we've been set free – it's the reason God's people were freed from slavery in Egypt, and it's the reason we've been set free; free from slavery to futility and despair; free so people might learn from us that God loves them.

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 his blood which is daubed around the doorframe of our lives; his blood which protects us from the angel of death. We remember that he is 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 privileged to shine in the world's night, like a bonfire of hope, burning on a mountaintop, guiding lost travellers to safety, to welcome, to love, to home – to Jesus.

*Grant, Lord, that we who receive the holy sacrament of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, may be the means by which the work of his incarnation shall go forward. Take, consecrate, break and distribute us, to be for others a means of your grace, and vessels of your eternal love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.***