

Sermon for Maundy Thursday  
April 6, 2023  
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Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church  
Los Alamos, New Mexico

Exodus 12:1-14  
Psalm 116: 1, 10-17  
1 Corinthians 11:23-26  
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

A fellow priest once shared with me:  
The writer of the story told of meeting a minister when he was visiting churches in Scotland. They got to talking and sharing stories.<sup>1</sup>  
The elder minister had been an infantryman in World War II.  
He had been captured during one of those battles no longer remembered, and shipped to a German POW camp in Poland.

The conditions were horrid:  
no heat, meals were a single bowl of broth and a crust of bread.  
The men were starving, sick, filthy, and deep in despair.

For many the more charitable end was suicide by guard.  
They would run to the barbed wire fence and appear to be trying to escape, and be shot to death.

On one dark night of the soul,  
the man walked the perimeter and sat on the ground beside the fence  
to ponder whether to end his life and escape the camp through death.

As he sat there, in despair,  
he heard a sound in the darkness from the other side of the fence.

As he turned, a Polish farmer thrust his hand through the barbed wire  
and handed him half of a potato.

In heavily accented English he said, "The Body of Christ."

Way back in January – at the Baptism of the Lord –  
we encountered the first Sacrament – Baptism.  
Tonight – Maundy Thursday – we encounter the second Sacrament –  
the Eucharist, the Great Thanksgiving.

And in all those cases we share in water:  
water from which Jesus rose and saw the heavens open

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2013-09/shared-meal>; John M. Buchanan, *The Christian Century*, September 25, 2013.

and heard God express pleasure at his very being;  
water with which Jesus washed the feet of the disciples  
and invited us to share in the bread and wine of his body and blood.

The Eucharist of Christ's Passover began not in a palace,  
not in a temple, not on a mountain top,  
but in an upper room lit by oil lamps.  
Here a man, a teacher,  
welcomed his friends to share in a meal,  
and that meal has resonated down through the ages  
to this very room,  
to this very night.

Tonight begins the Triduum,  
the holiest days of the holiest week of the Christian year.

The Paschal Triduum comprises the "three days" of the passion,  
the death and the resurrection of our Lord and Savior.

The Paschal Triduum is one extended liturgy in three distinct parts:  
It begins with Maundy Thursday, r  
esumes with Good Friday,  
and ends at the Easter Vigil.

Maundy is a word that encompasses  
the washing of the disciple's feet by Jesus,  
but comes from the Latin word *mandatum*,  
which means commandment as Jesus says at the end of the Gospel:  
"I give you a new commandment,  
that you love one another."

The scene we see in the Gospel of John tonight is the Last Supper.  
In the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke  
this dinner is the Passover,  
the Jewish observance of the night on which the Angel of Death  
passed over the Hebrews  
and took the lives of the first-born males of the land of Egypt.

From that night for the next 40 years,  
the people journeyed through the desert on their way to the promised land.

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke,  
this gathering is when Jesus institutes the Eucharist,  
the Sacrament of Holy Communion  
to feed our souls with the bread of heaven and the cup of salvation.

We are reminded of the Eucharist

in the epistle reading from St. Paul's letter to the Church in Corinth.

I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,

“This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying,

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

In the Gospel of John, however,  
we are given the opportunity to begin to comprehend  
the Eucharist in light of Jesus' sacrifice  
and his new commandment  
“that you love one another as I have loved you.”

That love is expressed in the washing of feet  
in this Maundy Thursday service  
in which Jesus took the place of the servant  
who would wash the feet of guests as they entered the master's home.

This gesture of hospitality symbolizes the love of Jesus for his friends.  
This gesture symbolizes the love we share in our pastoral relationship.

That relationship extends in the Sacrament of the Eucharist  
shared one with another.  
The sharing feeds us at a very deep level.

So long ago in the darkness of a dismal night,  
a Polish farmer extended a hand to give half a potato  
to a man he did not know  
and brought him back to life.

Let us remember the love shared by Jesus  
with those few followers in that upper room  
in a meal of thanksgiving for all the ages.