

MAUNDY THURSDAY

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Introduction

When the church worships on Maundy Thursday, it remembers the last evening that Christ spent with his disciples in the upper room. Three major events make up this evening: he washed the disciple's feet, he instituted the Lord's Supper, and he gave them the "new" commandment to love one another. The name of this day comes from the last of these. "Maundy" comes from the Latin "*mandatum novum*," referring to the "new commandment" Jesus gave his disciples in John 13:34.

In some traditions, worship on Maundy Thursday involves foot washing. And always on Maundy Thursday, the Lord's Supper is the central part of worship. There are many rich dimensions of meaning in the Lord's Supper that are fitting for this occasion, such as Christ's preparation for his death, his call to communal love, and his clear sense of anticipation of his coming kingdom.

If Maundy Thursday is your only time of worship during Holy Week it should also call attention to the events of Good Friday, including Jesus' trial, crucifixion, and resulting death and burial.

You will find helpful worship planning resources for Maundy Thursday in *The Worship Sourcebook*, pages 593-603.

Sermon Notes:

Sermon: "Were You There in the Upper Room When He Washed Their Feet?" Scripture: John 13:1-17

The Scripture passage could be read very effectively by three readers—a narrator, Peter, and Jesus. Different voices for different persons in the event will make the reading "come alive" for listeners.

The sermon for this event easily lends itself to a narrative message. You can ask your listeners to come upstairs with you to make a visit to this upper room. You can use your biblical imagination to describe the neighborhood, the room, and the atmosphere in the room. There is some confusion in the room among the disciples. They don't quite know what to expect from Jesus, or just what the days ahead will involve, and what their role should be. The evening begins with a surprise from Jesus - a foot-washing from the person they least expected to do it. On Jesus' part, however, there is no confusion. He is very clear about his purpose, about what the evening will involve, about his need to confront Judas, warn Peter, and go to Gethsemane.

Draw your listeners into the commemoration of the Passover-the remembrance of the journey out of Egypt, the blessings pronounced, the cups of wine that are shared, and the washing of hands. What pain it must have involved for Christ for expose Judas as a betrayer in the midst of the Passover!

Then zero in on the foot-washing scene, which was apparently part of the Passover celebration. The pitcher, towel, basins, water are all there. The disciples are stunned when Jesus begins. The dialogue with Peter is typical of their resistance to this. What must have gone through their minds as they saw Jesus strip down to the robe of a slave, take the towel and tie it around his waist, and approach their feet? Did no one except Peter dare say anything? Did anybody reciprocate and wash Jesus' feet?

We can think of many reasons why this should NOT have happened this way. But why did it happen? Jesus was teaching them (us) about greatness. The disciples were caught up in being competitive and self-seeking at times, and they needed to learn the new definition of greatness (see Matt. 20:20-28 and Luke 9:46-48). Jesus was also trying to instill some humility in them. He was living out Philippians 2:6-8 before them, and that's why he spoke the words of John 13:13-17 to them.

If we had been there, how would we have reacted? What would we have said?

Music/Song Suggestions

"A New Commandment" by Unknown

"Meekness and Majesty" by Graham Kendrick

"Make Me a Channel of Your Peace" by Francis of Assisi

"Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love" by Tom Colvin

"Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service" by Albert F. Bayly

"May the Mind of Christ My Savior" by Kate Wilkinson and Arthur Barham-Gould

"What Wondrous Love Is This" by Alexander Means and William Walker

"In This Very Room" by Ron Harris

"Were You There?" African American spiritual

1. "Were you there when they crucified my Lord? "
2. "Were you there when he knelt to wash their feet?"
3. "Are you here to serve others in Christ's name?"