



Serving and Sharing

*Create a space for worship - perhaps with a small table with a bible, cross and candle.
Tonight, it would be appropriate to find a **purple** cloth or scarf as we journey towards Easter in a time of preparation called Lent.
Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.*

Light Candle

We light this candle...

Light the candle

And we breathe...

and we turn towards the one who is the Light of the World,
Jesus the Christ.

We seek the light.

We celebrate the light.

We allow ourselves to be drawn to the light.

We wonder at what the light reveals to us.



Acknowledgement of Country

The Ancient of Days, God our Creator, breathed life into this land and its peoples.

The land we gather on,

the land we live, work, play and worship on,

has been cared for since time immemorial by the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal Nation. It has never been ceded.

We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

We commit ourselves to building relationships with those who carry the sacred stories today.

And we commit ourselves to pursuing justice for their communities,
so that our reconciled life reflects the way of God here in this place.

Video - Let Us Be Known By Our Love

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FErmfaLbX2o>

Introduction

Tonight we begin the story that will carry us over the next 3 days.

While the story we remember is both tragic and challenging,

we also remember the story from the benefit of hindsight - we know the ending already!

So how might we enter this story with fresh eyes and open hearts,

seeking wisdom and deeper clarity about who Jesus is and who God is calling us to be.

From John's account, we gather with Jesus and the disciples, as Jesus teaches them and prays for them. Tonight we remember and recommit to the new commandment given by Jesus to love one another. We are reminded of the practical examples he gave to his followers, to us, to help us understand how to love each other - Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, and he invited them to share a meal.

Call to Worship

Jesus said:

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.

John 13:34-35

Tonight, we will hear how Jesus gave himself over to those who would persecute him.

Tonight, we will hear how Jesus gathered with his friends in an upper room.

Tonight, we will remember how Jesus took a towel and washed his friends' feet,
giving us an example of love in action.

Tonight, we gather to remember and practice the new commandment, to love one another:

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

1 Corinthians 11:26

Opening prayer

Before we get to Easter, we need to linger:
in the vulnerability of the basin and the towel
at the remembrance and promise of the table
in the struggle and betrayal of the garden
in the shadows and shouts of injustice
at the bloody brutal beautiful cross
in the silence of linen and spices and death
For without these, the empty tomb is empty...

*We Need to Linger © 2000 Lisa Ann Moss Degrenia,
www.revlisad.com*

Sing - The Servant King (TIS 256)

*So we sing a song that speaks of the love Jesus shows to us in serving, and his call to us
to do the same...*

From heaven you came helpless babe,
entered our world your glory veiled;
not to be served but to serve,
and give your life that we might live.

This is our God...

Come see his hands and his feet,
the scars that speak of sacrifice,
hands that flung stars into space
to cruel nails surrendered.

This is our God...

*This is our God, the Servant King,
he calls us now to follow him,
to bring our lives as a daily offering
of worship to the Servant King.*

There in the garden of tears,
my heavy load he chose to bear;
his heart with sorrow was torn,
"Yet not my will, but yours," he said.

So let us learn how to serve
and in our lives enthrone him;
each other's needs to prefer,
for it is Christ we're serving.

This is our God...

© 1983 Graham Kendrick

Prayer

Servant God,
kneeling,
bending,
serving us.
Take our dusty journeys,
and wrap your hands around them.

Every path we have trodden in life:
every word that has taken us to hurtful locations,
every thought that has moved us towards the shadows,
every act that had led us into rough places,
wash away the pain, as we confess,
and you forgive.

During a moment of silence pour some water.

Take the wounds of our travelling,
and hold them in your healing hands:
every journey of remembrance that holds too many memories,
every burden we carry that weighs us with anger we cannot let go,
every place we have visited that holds too much pain.
Wash away the lingering,
as we let go, and let you heal.

During a moment of silence pour some water.

Take the discomfort of our values,
and wash and wipe and cleanse as you serve us:
every lesson about love we have not learned,
every heavenly value we have not grasped,
every truth of your Realm we have ignored.
Wash away the hesitation,
as we accept your love,
and offer our love, too.

During a moment of silence pour some water.

Jesus says:
Come you who are weary,
you who are heavy laden.
Come and let my hands refresh your living.
Let me be your servant,
and witness heaven on earth.

Reading: John 13:1-17; 31-35

Narrator: ¹ Before the Passover festival began, Jesus was keenly aware that his hour had come to depart from this world and to return to the Father. From beginning to end, Jesus' days were marked by his love for his people.

² Before Jesus and his disciples gathered for dinner, the adversary filled Judas Iscariot's heart with plans of deceit and betrayal. ³ Jesus, knowing that he had come from God and was going away to God, ⁴ stood up from dinner and removed his outer garments. He then wrapped himself in a towel, ⁵ poured water in a basin, and began to wash the feet of the disciples, drying them with his towel.

Simon Peter: ⁶ Lord, are you going to wash my feet?

Jesus: ⁷ Peter, you don't realise what I am doing, but you will understand later.

Peter: ⁸ You will not wash my feet, now or ever!

Jesus: If I don't wash you, you will have nothing to do with me.

Peter: ⁹ Then wash me but don't stop with my feet. Cleanse my hands and head as well.

Jesus: ¹⁰ Listen, anyone who has bathed is clean all over except for the feet. But I tell you this, not all of you are clean.

Narrator: ¹¹ He knew the one with plans of betraying him, which is why he said, "not all of you are clean." ¹² After washing their feet and picking up his garments, he reclined at the table again.

Jesus: Do you understand what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and truly, that is who I am. ¹⁴ So if your Lord and Teacher washes your feet, then you should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I am your example; keep doing what I do. ¹⁶ I tell you the truth: a servant is not greater than the master. Those who are sent are not greater than the one who sends them. ¹⁷ If you know these things, and if you put them into practice, you will find happiness.

[pause]

Narrator: ³¹ Upon Judas's departure, Jesus spoke:

Jesus: Now the Son of Man will be glorified as God is glorified in him. ³² If God's glory is in him, his glory is also in God. The moment of this astounding glory is imminent. ³³ My children, my time here is brief. You will be searching for me; and as I told the Jews, "You cannot go where I am going." ³⁴ So I give you a new command: Love each other deeply and fully. Remember the ways that I have loved you, and demonstrate your love for others in those same ways. ³⁵ Everyone will know you as my followers if you demonstrate your love to others.

*Scripture taken from The Voice™.
Copyright © 2012 by Ecclesia Bible Society.
Used by permission. All rights reserved.*

For the Word of God in Scripture,
for the Word of God among us,
for the Word of God within us,
Thanks be to God!

Reflection

God of the betrayed,
God of the betrayer,
as we hear again of the events of that evening,
open our hearts to how you are calling us -
perhaps for the first time, perhaps for the hundredth time -
and strengthen our bodies and our resolve to be ready to respond.
In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

How much do you really dislike it when someone tells you the end of a movie you haven't seen yet or the end of a book you are only half-way through?! It is a little annoying, sometimes, isn't it?!

But isn't that how we enter this story of Jesus' betrayal, arrest and death?
We come tonight, and tomorrow morning, knowing the end of the story.

And there are couple of things about that - how many stories - movies or books - have you read and re-read as many times as this story has been?
What is it, for you, that makes this story so compelling?

If you are with people across this coming weekend who are not so familiar with the story, what might you say to them about why these events, this story, is so compelling? And, if the events of that first Easter are not so familiar to you, I hope you will discover with us, the wonder of who Jesus is, and who he calls you to be.

Even though the story is very familiar to many of us, it is important to remember, that each of the gospel writers, record these events differently. Just like the stories of Jesus' birth and, indeed, of his life, the record of his betrayal and death varies, in some places, quite significantly between the gospel writers. A great activity for reflection and contemplation tomorrow afternoon and on Saturday might be to read through each of the four accounts and notice the differences, and ponder or wonder why they might be recorded as they are.

In our services tonight and tomorrow, we bring together the four gospel accounts, drawing from each and kind of "mashing" them together.

Tonight, while we focus on John's account of what happens the night before Jesus died we also include the remembering of the Last Supper which comes from the accounts in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

(And tomorrow, by the way, we will listen to the account from Mark's gospel).

Matthew, Mark and Luke, on the night Jesus is betrayed, place him at the Passover meal where he takes the tradition of that meal and redefines it, giving it new meaning - in what we know as the "Last Supper".

For John, however, there is no Passover meal. In John's gospel, Jesus is arrested and dies on the day before the Passover, the day when traditionally, the passover animals are slaughtered for the feast. John, emphasises service and love in response to the liberating power of Christ. For John, there is a direct link between the death of Jesus and the liberation of Israel from slavery in Egypt, and so Jesus becomes the liberator of the whole world from the powers of empire - whatever they may be. And this liberation comes through service and love - a love that will give all of itself for the sake of the world.

For John, Jesus death is not so much about saving us from our sin as it is about a commitment to the path Jesus shows - a commitment to the way, the realm, the rule, the dream of God that sees us offering to one another the depth of love and grace and service that Jesus offers to the people around him, and to the world, through his death.

As we come to Christ's table tonight, may we hear again his invitation to us,
to come,
to follow,
to be nurtured and nourished by God's love along the way,
and to commit ourselves to that same way of love in our own living...

Sing - Feed Us Now (TIS 538)

As we come to the table, we sing our prayer that God will meet us and nourish us...

Feed us now, Bread of life,
in this holy meal;
let us know your love anew:
we hunger for you.
Feed us now, Bread of life,
come and live within;
let your peace be ours today,
Lord Jesus, we pray.

Piece of bread, cup of wine:
Lord, this food is good:
love and mercy come to us,
your promise we trust.
Piece of bread, cup of wine:
who can understand
how his mercy works in these?
Yet, Lord, we believe.

God is here, O so near,
nearer than our thoughts.
Stay with us where'er we go;
Lord, help us to grow.
God is here, O so near,
in this heaven's meal.
May we always feed on you –
on the bread that is true.

© Robin Mann

Communion

Invitation

So come.
Come knowing that there is a place for you right here.
Come, assured that God's love is for you, all of you.
Come, be filled with the food of heaven and the love of God.
May you be sustained, healed, and know life in all its fullness.

Telling the Story

The first time this story was told
they gathered around a table
a ragged collection of people -
broken,
betrayers,
the power-hungry,
fragile, lonely, lost.

The first time this story was told,
Jesus promised that it was for all time
and that *whenever* the bread is broken
and the wine is poured,
wherever the story is told around the table,
Jesus is here.

Today we tell the story as it has been told a thousand times over;
we break the bread;
we pour the wine;
sure, as we do,
that we belong at this table
and that Jesus is here with us.

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus gathered his friends around a table.
It was a special night, a celebration.
Jesus took the bread and gave thanks.
Then he broke it and invited them to share it saying,
"This is my body, for you."
After the meal, Jesus took a cup.
Again he gave thanks and then gave it to them to share saying,
"Drink from this, all of you, it is a sign of the new relationship with God made possible
because of my death.
Do this to remember me."

So we take this bread and juice, and set them apart.
Ordinary things of the earth made holy in our sharing in the presence of God.

Prayer of Thanksgiving
God is with us
Christ's Spirit is here.

Open your hearts
We open our lives to Christ's light and leading.

Let us give thanks to God
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Let us pray,

Abba God, Parent of us all,
on this sacred and Holy Night,
we give thanks for the wonder of your creation -
the wide expanse of ocean,
the majestic sandstone cliffs enfolding rich, fertile valleys,
the autumn coolness refreshing the earth.

We give thanks for our friend Jesus,
serving, healing, teaching, offering us a new, life-giving pathway,
and patiently waiting for us to return when we go astray.

We give thanks for our constant guide, the Holy Spirit,
inspiring, leading, energising our living.

We join the gathered saints in singing praises to you, the Triune God,
Holy, holy, Holy Lord,
God of service and vulnerability.
All the earth reflects your presence.
Hosanna in the highest!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of God.
Hosanna in the highest!

On this commemoration of Jesus' last meal with his disciples,
we pause to remember, the Prince of Peace.
We remember the life he lived...

We remember the teachings and stories he shared...

We remember the people he loved...

On this night, the disciples did not yet know that Christ would come again.
On this night, all they knew for sure was that Jesus would leave them.
When he took the bread, blessed and broke it,
they did not know that his body would also be broken.

When he took the cup, blessed and poured it,
they did not know that his blood would also spill.

Now -

We know that Jesus is our friend.

We know that Jesus has saved each of our lives in unique and intimate ways.

We know that to honour our friend we must try to honour each other,
offering love, hospitality and kindness,
while seeking peace, mercy and justice.

And so we break the bread, to remember him,
and the wholeness he found while broken.

And we pour the cup, to remember him,
and the abundance he shared while living in scarcity.

Guiding Spirit,
pour your love onto these gifts,
so that they may become to us,
a living remembering, of our friend and Saviour, Jesus, the Christ.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

***Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.***

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sin as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us in the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

***For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.***

Breaking bread

Bread is broken.

Friends, of Jesus,
this is the bread of life.

Thanks be to God.

Wine is poured.

This is the cup of blessing.

Thanks be to God.

These are Christ's gifts to us.

May we eat and drink in memory of him.

The One who has suffered for our injustices is present to us in this bread.

The One whose body was hung on a cross, is offered to us in this cup.

In these, God comes to us, inviting us to come once more to God.

Listen - The Greatest Commandment (The Porters Gate, *Neighbour Songs*)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pEIUWTNsYXU>

Prayer

According to John's telling of the events of that night. Jesus spent time reminding the disciples of his love and of what they are to do when he was no longer going to be amongst them.

The writer of John's gospel then records that Jesus prays for his disciples before they leave to go to the garden where they would be met by Judas and the soldiers.

So before we go from here, let us pray - for ourselves, for the world...

Abba God,
we thank you for Jesus,
who on the night he was betrayed,
choose to share love and friendship with his disciples.

As Jesus spent time with his disciples reminding them of his love,
reminding them of his hope for them that they would continue to love,
so remind us again of your love for us,
and your call to us to show your love in a world that needs it so much.

We pray for each soul tonight who is lonely, tired, or ill.
We pray for each soul tonight who is facing death.
We pray for each soul tonight who is sitting by a bedside holding vigil.
We pray for each soul tonight who is hungry or cold or without a place to call home.
We pray for each soul tonight who is confused, lost or frightened.

We pray that in our living, you will help us to be bearers of your hope,
your peace,
your healing,
your love.
Amen.

Postlude

So now we go into the night - following Jesus into the night.

Tomorrow we will gather to remember the next part of this story - as Jesus is arrested, questioned, and ultimately condemned to death.

There is a tradition on this night, that as we leave the sanctuary, we strip it of all its decoration, ready for the solemnity of Good Friday. If you feel so inclined, after our closing song, you might like to come and take something with you - from the communion table, the things on the table at the front, the flowers, the drapes, the banner - just leave them on the table at the back...

As with all our services this week, there is no benediction, just an invitation to gather again tomorrow morning as we remember the next part of this challenging and tragic story, waiting and hoping for the promise of resurrection.

Sending

Sing - A New Commandment (TIS 699)

As we leave this time together, we go singing a song that reminds us of Jesus' call to us to love - always...

A new commandment, I give unto you
that you love one another as I have loved you,
that you love one another as I have loved you.
By this will others know that you are my disciples
if you have love one for another;
by this will others know that you are my disciples
if you have love one for another.

Liturgy drawn from *Seasons of the Spirit*, Resources for Maundy Thursday 2020 and 2021

Rev Kath Merrifield
28 March 2024