

MAUNDY THURSDAY

AN AT-HOME LITURGY FOR AN AWKWARD TIME

THE BIG IDEA:

As we prepare for Holy Week, let's resist the temptation to try to make it normal. It's not.

We are all likely under shelter-in-place restrictions of some kind. Our communities are being dramatically reshaped by pandemic and economic distress, by anxiety and loss. Nothing about this Holy Week is normal.

But then again, that's what Holy Week is: it's an abnormal story, a very empty story, a lonely story.

It's a story of presence wrapped up inside of absence.

This Thursday, let's practice presence wrapped up in absence, and rest in the loneliness of this story.

At the center of tonight's story is a meal. A table set, bodies washed and ready, a feast shared, and then the table is stripped. Emptied. Laid bare.

And in that barrenness, we recognize our own growing loneliness, our overwhelming separations, our own inhospitality—toward God, toward one another, toward ourselves—as we strip it all down.

What You Will Need:

1. A copy of this liturgy, either on a device or in printed form, for each person participating with you
2. 1 candle, and a lighter
3. A Bible
4. A cross to place at the center of the table
5. Bread and a meal to share

There is a profound simplicity about the essentials, since they arise out of Scripture and the early church's worship, which unfolded the meaning of Christ's redemptive action.

From the history of this pattern of elements, we have included [five]:

- 1. Introductory rites emphasizing penitence, (turning towards God)*
- 2. The liturgy of the Word of God, (listening to God)*
- 3. Footwashing, (handwashing, being forgiven by God)*
- 4. Love Feast, (being cared for by God)*
- 5. The stripping of the church (waiting for Good Friday)*

PART 1: SETTING THE TABLE

As you set the table, put out the plates and knives and the salt, place a Bible, a cross, and a candle at the center.

Who else should be at your table?

Can your family join with another family using the gifts of technology?

If you are home alone, maybe you can plan to call a friend and to set the table with a phone or a device.

Either way, don't feel that you have to go it alone.

If you are praying in solitude, pray both the leader and response.

If you are praying with others, the leader prays the words in plain text and the people respond with the words in bold.

Begin with light and then with prayer.

LIGHTING THE CANDLE

Light the candle against the growing darkness.

Light and peace in Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God!

CONFESSION AND PARDON

My sisters and brothers,

Christ shows us his love by becoming a humble servant.

Let us draw near to God and confess our sin in the truth of God's Spirit.

Most merciful God,

We, your Church, confess

that often our spirit has not been that of Christ.

Where we have failed to love one another as he loves us,

Where we have pledged loyalty to him with our lips

and then betrayed, deserted, or denied him,

forgive us, we pray;

and by your Spirit make us faithful in every time of trial;

through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ.

But Christ suffered and died for us,

was raised from the dead and ascended on high for us,

and continues to intercede for us.
Believe the good news:
In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven!
Glory to God. Amen.

FESTIVE SONG

Charles Wesley wrote the following blessing for the Love Feast. It is sung to the tune TERRA BEATA ("This Is My Father's World", UMH 144).

**Father of earth and heaven,
Thy hungry children feed,
Thy grace be to our spirits given,
That true immortal bread.**

**Grant us and all our race
In Jesus Christ to prove
The sweetness of thy pardoning grace,
The manna of thy love.**

GOSPEL WORD

Read aloud John 13:1-17, 31-35:

Before the Festival of Passover, Jesus knew that his time had come to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them fully.

Jesus and his disciples were sharing the evening meal. The devil had already provoked Judas, Simon Iscariot's son, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew the Father had given everything into his hands and that he had come from God and was returning to God. So he got up from the table and took off his robes. Picking up a linen towel, he tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a washbasin and began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he was wearing. When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You don't understand what I'm doing now, but you will understand later."

"No!" Peter said. "You will never wash my feet!"

Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't have a place with me."

Simon Peter said, "Lord, not only my feet but also my hands and my head!"

Jesus responded, “Those who have bathed need only to have their feet washed, because they are completely clean. You disciples are clean, but not every one of you.” He knew who would betray him. That’s why he said, “Not every one of you is clean.”

After he washed the disciples’ feet, he put on his robes and returned to his place at the table. He said to them, “Do you know what I’ve done for you? You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you speak correctly, because I am. If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you too must wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example: Just as I have done, you also must do. I assure you, servants aren’t greater than their master, nor are those who are sent greater than the one who sent them. Since you know these things, you will be happy if you do them.

When Judas was gone, Jesus said, “Now the Human One has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify the Human One in himself and will glorify him immediately. Little children, I’m with you for a little while longer. You will look for me—but, just as I told the Jewish leaders, I also tell you now—‘Where I’m going, you can’t come.’

“I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other.”

Blessing the Meal

Tune: OLD HUNDREDTH

**Be present at our table, Lord:
Be here and everywhere adored;
Thy creatures bless and grant that we
May feast in paradise with Thee.**

WASHING OUR HANDS

*In this time where handwashing has taken on new importance,
we wash our hands to be ready to share this meal.*

As you wash, say the Lord’s Prayer. Quite beautifully, the Lord’s Prayer takes about 20 seconds to recite (the recommended length of time for effective handwashing).

PART 2: SHARING THE MEAL

Passing the Bread

As the bread is shared, each person shares what Love is leading them toward today.

Feasting Together

As you feast together, reflect on the Gospel reading:

When was a time you chose love this week?

When was a time you found it difficult to love this week?

When was a time you felt loved by someone this week?

Prayer after the Meal

For these, and all of your mercies, God,
may your holy name be blessed and praised;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Benediction

Say together, as you are able:

May Jesus Christ,
who for our sake became obedient unto death, even death on a cross,
keep you and strengthen you this night and forever. Amen.

Disconnect with any friends or family outside of your home after you share in this blessing together, as you prepare to strip the table and end the evening in silence.

PART 3: STRIPPING THE TABLE

This work is the central work of the night.

After you have disconnected, work to clear the table and clean up the meal. Wash the dishes by hand, dry them, and put them away.

Package up any leftovers and put away the condiments, the salt, and the pepper.

Empty your table of anything, save the cross and the candle.

If you can, strip your home a little, too. Take down some pictures, leaving the empty nails. Remove enough things that your home feels a bit more bare, a little more stark for what is to come.

Return to the table together, maybe singing a simple Taizé refrain like “Stay with us” (AUDIO INCLUDED ONLINE)

Sit with Silence

Linger at the empty table, in a silence filled only by the light of the candle.

As you leave the table, blow the candle out.