

Title: A Recipe for Remembrance
Date: 4/6/2023 (Maundy Thursday)
Location: St. Alban's Episcopal Church
Service: 7pm Holy Eucharist (Hybrid)
Readings: [Exodus 12:1-14](#); [1 Corinthians 11:23-26](#); [John 13:1-17, 31b-35](#); [Psalm 116:1, 10-17](#)
Video Link: <https://youtu.be/9gKUbx9hiUo?t=1175>

How shall I repay you, O Lord
for all the good things you have done for me?
I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call upon your name.
I will fulfill my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all the people (Psalm 116:10-12¹).
Amen.

Tonight we celebrate Maundy Thursday. “Maundy,” spelled m-a-u-n-d-y, comes from the Latin word “mandatum,”² which means “command.” This is the root of the word “mandate.” So, tonight we gather to remember and follow a series of mandates.

These are no ordinary mandates. These are commands given on the eve of two of the biggest events in the Bible, the Exodus and the Crucifixion.

On the night before God liberated the people of Israel from their enslavement in Egypt,³ God gave them a set of instructions to follow for more than just one night. God decreed that this day of remembrance shall be celebrated as a festival throughout all generations, and this week our Jewish siblings are celebrating Passover once again.

The passage from Exodus reads like a recipe:

Take one one-year-old lamb, no blemish
Kill it at twilight
Reserve blood for doorposts and lintels
Roast over fire and serve with unleavened bread and bitter herbs
Consume with your loins girded, sandals on feet, and staff in hand
Eat quickly, and burn the leftovers
Serves one large household or several small ones.

In the calendar of readings assigned for today, these verses are marked optional, probably because it's such a detailed list. And I love it *because* of all the details.

Given my type A personality, a very detailed list is good because it helps me make sure that I can get everything right. There are boxes to check! A very detailed list can also lead to anxiety, because then there is this pressure to get everything just right.

The good news is that this isn't a recipe we have to follow so that God *will* save us. This is a recipe we follow to remember that God has *already* saved us. We don't have to earn it; we can't earn it. We just need to live as if we believe it.

As the story of the Exodus is being retold at the Seder, the special meal Jews eat at Passover, all these details help bring that story to life in the present day.

The presence of bitter herbs on the table echoes the bitter herbs served with the lamb. The bitter taste of those herbs brings into the present the bitterness of enslavement.

Gathering friends and family around the table echo the practical instruction for neighbors to split the cost of a lamb. It also brings into the present the spirit behind that command: What one person or one household cannot do alone, we do together. No one is to be turned away from God's table because they couldn't afford to be there.

Joel Baden⁴, professor of Hebrew Bible at Yale Divinity School, explains that the Hebrew Bible is really about what it means to be in community, and that one aspect of being part of God's people is to participate in a ritualized thing together.⁵ The practical details of a ritualized meal like this and in the foot-washing we are about to do can help us become more grounded in the spiritual aspects of our faith, especially when we experience it year after year.

Thousands of years ago, God liberated the people of Israel from their enslavement in Egypt. Though that happened at a specific place and time in history, when we bring that night into the present, it reinforces for us that God **still** walks with the people of God in **this** age, toward freedom from modern-day enslavement, captivity, and oppression.

The question is, will *we* walk with God?

The appearance of slavery has changed over time, from the deserts of Egypt to the plantations in America to farms and sweatshops and factories and prisons and warehouses and other kinds of abusive and exploitative relationships.

The Pharaoh and his overseers have taken new form, found new ways to exert control. Will we walk with those who are seeking liberation, those who seek the freedom to make choices for their own body, for their own future?

As Christians, today we remember another night, a night when Jesus gave his disciples a series of mandates. In the gospel according to John, this is the last meal he will share with them, the last chance he has to tell them everything he wants them to know. This is his last will and testament.

The entire Farewell Discourse runs for three chapters (Jn 14-17), and tonight we remember these particular instructions:

- Allow your feet to be washed.
- Kneel and wash each other's feet, no exceptions
- Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another.

Again, this isn't a recipe we have to follow so that God *will* save us. This is a recipe we follow to remember that God has *already* saved us. We don't have to earn it; we can't earn it. We just need to live as if we believe it.

First, allowing our feet to be washed echoes the experience of the disciples. It brings into the present Jesus' conversation with Peter.

He was the only one who showed any sign of resistance or discomfort when Jesus came to wash his feet, telling him, "You will never wash my feet." In response, Jesus said, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."

This brings into the present the reminder that as disciples of Jesus, first we need to open ourselves to receiving. Before we insist on being the one who gives to others, it is important to know what it feels like to receive love and care in such a vulnerable way.

It takes a lot to be willing to accept help, to be cared for. When we put ourselves in that position, there is a lot to be learned. We might identify our points of resistance and so understand why other people resist. We might feel more strongly about protecting and walking with and advocating for those who are in a vulnerable place, whether because of their race, gender identity, social class, etc.

Jesus emptied himself and took our form so he could truly know us. If we don't do likewise, we will have missed something important, and we will have no share with him.

Second, kneeling and washing each other's feet echoes Jesus' command to follow his example. As we wash one another's feet, that brings into the present all the other things Jesus did.

For example,

he ate with people that other people didn't want to eat with.

He recognized when it was time to go off by himself and pray.

He washed the feet of the person who would betray him; he didn't cast out Judas, he washed his feet.

He made it so that those who were sick or possessed by demons would be embraced as part of the community again.

The more we follow his examples in these ways, the more we make that third instruction a reality in our time. Jesus tells his disciples, "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" (Jn 13:34-35).

This is a love grounded in action.

This is a love that shows that our faith, our beliefs,

and all that we hold to be true

are not just out there,

nor do they stay up in here (point to brain).

Our faith, our beliefs, and all that we hold to be true also shows up in what we say and what we do, in our hearts and hands and feet. It shows up in the space between us, in the connection between us, in how we relate to and love one another.

We don't do any of this so that God *will* save us. We do this in remembrance that God has *already* saved us. We don't have to earn it; we can't earn it. We just need to live as if we believe it.

Amen.

¹ <https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/GS2016-Liturgical-Psalter-2016-05-04.pdf>

² <http://definition.org/define/mandatum/>

³ <https://time.com/5188494/passover-history-traditions/>

⁴ <https://divinity.yale.edu/faculty-and-research/yds-faculty/joel-s-baden>

⁵ <https://yalebiblestudy.org/podcast/a-retrojected-festival-maundy-thursday/>