

MARK: Jesus' Final Week
Thursday
Mark 14:12-26 and John 13:1-17
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On Palm Sunday, Jesus entered Jerusalem to a hero's welcome. On Monday, He cleared the temple of the buyers and sellers and the animals being sold for sacrifices and declared, "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." On Holy Tuesday, the religious leaders repeatedly tried to entangle Jesus with difficult questions, and He had a discussion with his disciples about the end. On Wednesday, a woman anointed Jesus' head with expensive perfume—which Jesus interpreted as preparing Him for his upcoming burial—and Mark concluded Wednesday with these ominous words: "Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over" (Mark 14:10–11).

Throughout Lent, we're walking day by day through Jesus' final week. This morning, two weeks prior to Easter, we're focusing on Maundy Thursday, the day Jesus ate the Last Supper with his disciples and washed his disciples' feet, and late Thursday night, Jesus was arrested. All week, since Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the religious leaders had been plotting and scheming to arrest Jesus, and now they'd gotten the break they'd been looking for. Judas, one of Jesus' 12 disciples, agreed to betray Jesus by handing Him over to them.

Thursday of Passover week was traditionally the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the day the Passover lamb was eaten. The Seder is the Jewish ritual meal eaten every year during Passover as a reminder of God's deliverance of his people from Pharaoh's rule in Egypt. The elements of the meal symbolize important aspects of the Passover. Bitter herbs help recall the suffering of Israelite slaves for 400 years in Egypt, bread memorializes the manna God provided his people in the desert, lamb reminds the eater of the sacrifice that was made to atone for sins, and wine symbolizes the blood of a lamb the Israelites placed over their doorpost so the Angel of Death would pass over their house. The Passover meal would be an ideal time for Judas to deliver Jesus over to the religious leaders, because Jesus would be eating

the meal with his disciples at a designated time and place in a confined space, but Jesus had special plans for the Passover meal that He wasn't going to allow to be interrupted. As we'll see, Jesus spoke new meaning into several of the meal's elements to connect them with his own sacrifice for sin. I invite you to follow along as I read verses 12–26 of Mark chapter 14.

On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

¹³ So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. ¹⁴ Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' ¹⁵ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there."

¹⁶ The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

¹⁷ When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. ¹⁸ While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me."

¹⁹ They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, "Surely you don't mean me?"

²⁰ "It is one of the Twelve," he replied, "one who dips bread into the bowl with me. ²¹ The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."

²² While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."

²³ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it.

²⁴ "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them.

²⁵ "Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

²⁶ When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

(Mark 14:12–26)

This section of Scripture begins with Jesus, early in the day on Thursday, cryptically telling his disciples to meet a man carrying a water jar, follow him to his house, and then ask him if The Teacher and his disciples could eat the Passover in his guest room. The disciples did as Jesus instructed them, and when the man consented, they made preparations to eat the Passover meal with Jesus.

Jesus gathered with his disciples to eat the Passover meal that evening, and as they were eating, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.” The disciples did what you or I would have done in that situation. They each began asking Him, “It’s not me, is it?” And Jesus responded by telling them the one who dipped his hand into the bowl with Jesus would be the one to betray Him.

Mark, as is his pattern throughout his Gospel, gives us the fewest details of any of the Gospel writers. This is both the beauty and the challenge of having four gospel accounts. The beauty is that we have four eyewitness portrayals, and so we get a much fuller account than if only one person were telling the story. The challenge comes when the gospel writers’ accounts differ or when one writer shares details another leaves out. Matthew and John’s Gospels give us much more detail than Mark’s. John tells us that after Jesus identified his betrayer as the one to whom He would give the bread He dipped in the bowl, Jesus handed the bread to Judas and told him, “What you are about to do, do quickly.” And Judas got up and went to the religious leaders to put the plans in motion to have Jesus arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.

In Matthew’s account, there is a lot more that happens on Thursday night. We’re told that after Jesus and his disciples ate the Passover Meal, they sang a hymn and then went to the Mount of Olives. On the way or perhaps after they arrived, Jesus told them that they would all fall away from Him when He was arrested. Peter boldly stepped up and said, “Even if all fall away, I will not.” Jesus told Peter he was wrong—that in fact before morning came, he would deny Jesus three times—but Peter insisted, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples agreed.

On the Mount of Olives, Jesus and the disciples went to a place called Gethsemane. Jesus went there to pray, and He asked his disciples to do the same, but they kept falling asleep. While there, Jesus prayed his famous prayer: “Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” When Jesus realized his disciples couldn’t stay awake, He told them to get up and leave, because his betrayer was coming. I’ll pick up reading at verse 43 of Mark chapter 14.

⁴³ Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders.

⁴⁴ Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” ⁴⁵ Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. ⁴⁶ The men seized Jesus and arrested him. ⁴⁷ Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

⁴⁸ “Am I leading a rebellion,” said Jesus, “that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? ⁴⁹ Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.” ⁵⁰ Then everyone deserted him and fled.

⁵¹ A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, ⁵² he fled naked, leaving his garment behind. (Mark 14:43-51)

The last verse that has the odd detail about the young man following Jesus who fled naked when Jesus was arrested is interesting, because most scholars believe the young man is the Gospel’s author, Mark. This was Mark’s way of identifying himself and acknowledging his own failure to stay with Jesus during his trial and crucifixion.

As I said earlier, there is so much packed into the last hours of Thursday. In verses 53–72, we read about Jesus’ interaction with the religious leaders, his farce of a trial, and Peter’s three denials. All of these events are vitally important, but I want to turn our attention to the event from which Thursday gets its name, Maundy Thursday. Mark doesn’t record this aspect of

the Passover Meal, but it's such a vital part of Jesus' final week that we'd be remiss not to explore it. I'm referring to Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet as it's recorded in John 13:1–17. I encourage you to follow along as I read John 13:1–17 and then verses 31–34.

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (John 13:1–5)

To us, washing the feet of another person is a symbolic, kind of nostalgic act. Most of us have good hygiene, and our feet are relatively clean. I remember as a kid when we had foot washing services at church, my mom would make sure we all had clean feet—presumably because it would be embarrassing to muddy the water that everyone was using. I don't know that I thought of it at the time, but looking back I can't help but wonder, "Wouldn't having unwashed, dirty feet actually have made this a more realistic ceremony?" Let's look a bit more closely at what was going on here to put Jesus' act of washing his disciples' feet in context.

People in that culture wore sandals or went barefoot, and the roadways were dirt or gravel, so you can imagine their feet got very dirty. It was the custom when a guest came to eat a meal that the servant(s) of the host would wash all the guests' feet. If no servant was present, the job of washing feet fell to the person who was lowest in social status. I wonder when it dawned on the disciples that since there were no servants present, the task of washing feet would fall to one of them. We know from other accounts of them arguing among themselves about who was the greatest and James and John's bold power grab for seats at Jesus' right and left in paradise (remember they sent their mother to ask Jesus for those spots for them?), that the 12 were very status conscious. I can imagine John, who is believed to be one of the youngest of the disciples, thinking, "I am the youngest, so maybe this task would fall to me, but

I'm important because I'm part of Jesus' inner circle along with James and Peter." Or Peter thinking, "I'm not washing these guys' feet. Not only am I one of the oldest, I'm the spokesman for the group." I wonder if there was an uncomfortable silence in the room as they waited to see who would step forward and claim the title as "the least?"

We're not privy to those details. All we know is what John tells us in his Gospel. "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him." Jesus was able to claim the lowest spot—in the eyes of the world—and wash his disciples' feet because He knew who He was, and He knew what his mission was. He was their Lord and Master, their rabbi, but he donned the towel and washed their feet.

I can imagine the room being filled with stunned silence as Jesus washed his disciples' feet, each of them blushing with embarrassment over the impropriety of what was taking place. Not only were they ashamed Jesus was washing their feet, but they were also embarrassed they hadn't volunteered to wash the others' feet. We don't know how many disciples' feet Jesus washed, but when He came to Peter, Peter couldn't stay quiet.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" "Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. (John 13:6–11)

When Jesus arrived at Peter, Peter objected, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet? No, you shall never wash my feet." Jesus responded that unless He washed Peter's feet, Peter had

no part with Him. Then Peter said, “Not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well.” That response captures Peter’s “all or nothing” approach to life well.

Jesus’ washing of his disciples’ feet was a practical example of his love and service for his disciples, an act that communicated his love for them more clearly than anything He would do for them until his supreme sacrifice of giving his life on the cross. In verses 12–17, He attempts to connect the dots for his disciples, tying together things that He’s said to them many times with the act of service He had just done for them.

¹² When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. ¹³ “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. (John 13:12–17)

Now let’s skip ahead to verses 31–34.

³¹ When he (Judas) was gone, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

³³ “My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

³⁴ “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:31-35)

Maunder is the Latin word for mandate, and Maunday Thursday gets its name from the command or mandate Jesus gave to his disciples in verses 34–35: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will

know you are my disciples, if you love one another.” As clearly as any other words Jesus spoke, the words Jesus spoke in those two verses sum up his life and mission as well as his desire for his followers and his Church. I’d like you to read those words aloud with me: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Church family, that is Jesus’ call for you and for me and for us as his Church. Love in our culture has taken on a kind of sappy reputation that’s captured in statements like, “Love makes the world go round.” That’s not the kind of love Jesus was advocating. Jesus calls us to love others as He has loved us, and He goes on to say that the way people will know we’re his followers is based on how well we love one another. The love Jesus calls us to, which He demonstrated by washing his disciples’ feet, serves others above ourselves and isn’t concerned with status. As we receive Communion today, I encourage us to remember and celebrate what Jesus did, first by washing his disciples’ feet and then by giving his life for us on the cross. And I challenge us to embrace Jesus’ posture of love and service and sacrifice in our lives. Paul captured Jesus’ love and service beautifully in chapter 2 of his letter to the Philippians:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:3-8)