



A Family Observance of Maundy Thursday

It is helpful to read through this at-home worship service ahead of time and discuss with anyone participating some specific details so all will be prepared. Make any adjustments necessary for you to make it work best for you and your family.

Preparing for your Dinner Worship

Setting the Table

This Maundy Thursday service was designed for use in the home, around the dinner table (whatever shape that takes). If possible, the table should be set with the best the house has to offer. A fine tablecloth perhaps, flowers, and the best place settings. We sit down to feast with God and for that we bring our best. If your best is a folding table and takeout containers God will be as honored by that as fine silver and crystal.

This service draws from the Eucharistic tradition, but it is not a sacramental meal. We call it *Eucharistia*: Ancient **Greek** (ευχαριστία), meaning “gratitude, giving of thanks.” And this we can and should do whenever we share the bounty of the earth!

As Christians we give thanks for the blessing of God’s nourishment, which includes the food and drink shared, and the people gathered for this occasion. Prepare the dinner of your choosing before beginning (all are encouraged to help with meal preparation).

Two recipes for bread have been included if you wish to make it at home, but you can use any bread you have available. (This is a great place to involve children, allowing them to assist in the making or preparing of the bread.)

- Unleavened Bread: <https://www.allrecipes.com/recipe/241680/unleavened-bread-for-communion/>
- Yeast Bread: <https://www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/basic-homemade-bread/>

Similarly, use whatever beverage makes sense for you and those gathered. In the ancient world wine was safe (when the water was not) and was a staple. Using a beverage that is a staple of your dinner table is always acceptable.

The service has been prepared so that various parts can be shared out among those present, don’t be afraid to let children read and lead! Each part is either meant to be read by a single person, or by all who are present. This is indicated with “One” or “All.” The “One” selections may be shared and a single leader is not required. While this service provides for a small gathering, it can be done by an individual who, while physically alone, is nevertheless gathered in spirit with the rest of the church this night. **Any who are reading will need a copy of this document or a shared one.**

One candle (called the Christ candle) should be placed on the table and lit before the service begins, it will remain lighted throughout. (If you select to do the additional candle option below, a candle will be given to each person present).

If desired those gathered in that place should bring flowers, potted plants, beloved objects, the Christ candle or other lights. A place to watch with Jesus (and a reminder of the Garden of Gethsemane) can be made with these things and those who feel so called can spend some time here on this evening, reading scripture and praying, which is keeping vigil.

As you begin, before your meal

All: **We begin by washing, as we were washed in our baptism. We cleanse our hands as we were cleansed in the waters of new birth. We do this not because we are afraid, but because we were commanded to love: and to cleanse our hands, and gather in spirit, is how we love the vulnerable, whom Jesus loved. May we be instruments of love. May the sacrifices we make be for the good of our human family near and far.**

Each person present then washes their hands thoroughly with soap and water. Once washed each should help with setting the table as they are able. The food should be set out in the middle with bread and drink and other good things. When all is ready those present take their places at the table and the one designated begins.

Another option if a candle is available for each person.

Each person may now take their candle, light it, and place it at their place at the table.

One: **As Jesus traveled he spread light wherever he went, light that could not be extinguished.**

Each One as they light their candle: I am thankful that Jesus Christ is my light.

When all have taken their places at the table.

Opening

One: **[Beloveds/Dear ones/Friends] tonight is a holy night. Tonight we join with Christians around the world as we remember the last night our Jesus spent with his friends. We gather around a table, and with all those who remember tonight. Though we are all apart, we are together, in spirit and in truth.**

Tonight is about friendship, and love. But not all the stories tonight are happy, because suffering and evil are real. So tonight we will eat a meal, we will share stories, and we will pray together.

Blessing of the Meal

Because we believe we are priests to one another, each called by God to minister, we serve one another.

This would be a good, appropriate place to listen to “Now, My Tongue, the Mystery Telling” (Sarum Plainsong) provided by Dr. Robert Gallagher, Minister of Music. The music is from our 2019 Maundy Thursday Service. The music is available at rreb.org/mtmusic.

The one who blesses the bread, takes the bread and holds it where all may see it.
A child can hold it up and read or have an adult read as they hold it up.

One: **On the night that Jesus gathered with his friends he took bread and he blessed it and shared it with his friends, for God who loves us, feeds us. As God’s people ate manna in the wilderness and were satisfied, so we share this bread with Christ, and with one another. May it be for us bread from heaven, strength for our bodies, comfort for our souls, and may it empower us to be Christ’s body in this world.**

The bread is passed or carried by one around the table for all to take their fill, to eat with your meal.

The one who blesses the cup then takes it and holds it where all may see it (a child can hold it up).

One: **On the night that Jesus gathered with his friends he took the cup and he blessed it and shared it with them. As Jesus offered the Samaritan woman water that will not fail, so Jesus offers us the same. May this cup be for us the holy drink of heaven, and may it fill our thirsty souls.**

The drink is then poured, filling the cups of all present.

The whole company together then blesses the rest of the meal, saying together.

All (or One): **Holy and life-giving God, we thank you for the bounty of your Creation laid before us. We ask you to bless it, that it may be to us a holy meal. We give thanks for all those who labored so that it might sustain us, and we ask that through it you would give us the strength to be your good stewards; to care, and tend your creation, and to care especially for our brothers and sisters, all the people of this world. Tonight, be with all the members of our community who we love and miss, those who are not here with us to share this meal. We ask these things by the grace of Jesus Christ our Brother and the Holy Spirit our friend and guide. Amen.**

Enjoy your meal. Conversation and questions are encouraged, for this is a gathering of friends.

As feels appropriate the following passage can be read, during the meal as seems appropriate.

John 13:1-17, 31b-35 *The Last Supper*

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

"Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' 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." (*Reading taken from the NRSV*)

As the meal is concluded and the dishes are still on the table read this passage from John 18.

John 18:1-11 *The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus*

After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "For whom are you looking?" They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he", they stepped back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, "For whom are you looking?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go." This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken, "I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me." Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?" (*Reading taken from the NRSV*)

One: Our dinner is over, the waiting begins. Tonight Jesus was alone, under arrest, and awaiting his death. Tonight his friends were alone with their guilt, shame, and fear. Tonight we are missing our normal routines, our communities, and friends. Many are alone, isolated and afraid, Jesus waits with us all tonight, even as we wait with him. Jesus knows what loneliness feels like, what fear tastes like. Jesus knows the heartbreak of being alone when you want most to be with people you love. Tonight we wait with and pray for the sick, the fearful, the lonely, and with all who risk their own lives to protect and care for ours.

One: We are invited to clear away the dishes, and clean up the remains of our meal prayerfully and quietly. Tonight this table was our altar, and this place our sanctuary. Let us clean it of all that has come before this moment: of our anxiety, our worry, our sorrow, and our shame.

The table may then be cleared by all present, as each is able. Each person extinguishes their individual candle. The Christ candle may be left lighted. While the table is being cleared, the table cloth removed, and the table wiped down and dried, *it is another good time to listen to the music provided by Dr. Gallagher.*

Then, one person may read Psalm 51.

Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, then you will delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar. *(Reading taken from the NRSV)*

When the table is cleared all gather together for a final prayer and invitation to keep vigil.

One: Holy One, draw near to your people this night, wait and watch with us; for our hearts are heavy. Send your holy angels to watch over the sick, and to guide the hands of those who care for them. Comfort us as a mother soothes her beloved children. May we watch, and wait, strengthened by your presence. Amen.