

Maundy Thursday Service: an Easter Meditation

This is a service based on *tenebrae* a service of shadows which is traditional and observed across Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant traditions. *Tenebrae* means shadows and as we see Christ approaching the cross, the shadows lengthen – and darkness descends. But why? Because of our sins! This encourages us to remember that it was our sins that put Him there and reflect on the continuing sin in our lives when there shouldn't be because Jesus died to free us from it. My version ends in a twist rather than leaving the congregation in darkness which traditional services do.

As we have again met around the Lord's Table to celebrate again that Last Supper, where Jesus instituted this feast. We have remembered again how God sent His own dear Son into the world to die for us. We have remembered again how He suffered the most humiliating and degrading form of torture and death of His age – His body was broken and His blood was shed for us.

We have been pleased to own Him Saviour and Lord when we know there are so many in this world who have not or will not put their faith and trust in Him. It was the same in Jesus' time. We read these words in John's Gospel:

42 Even then, many of the Jewish authorities believed in Jesus; but because of the Pharisees they did not talk about it openly, so as not to be expelled from the synagogue. 43 They loved human approval rather than the approval of God. John 12

How will the world know me; by my loving confession of faith that Jesus is Lord, or by my desire for the human glory that at times I love more than my own salvation?

CANDLE 1

But worse than that we are so often like Peter, who is recorded as saying this: 33 Peter spoke up and said to Jesus, "I will never leave you, even though all the rest do!" 34 Jesus said to Peter, "I tell you that before the cock crows tonight, you will say three times that you do not know me." 35 Peter answered, "I will never say that, even if I have to die with you!" And all the other disciples said the same thing. Matthew 26

How fragile is my love for the Lord; how many times have I denied what I know to be true in order to save myself from being found out, from being ostracised, from being criticized, from being harmed?

CANDLE 2

There are friends we have who no longer are our friends. There are some we loved as intimates and family we no longer call beloved. We hear Judas speak, yet they are words of betrayal: Jesus was still speaking when a crowd arrived, led by Judas, one of the twelve disciples. He came up to Jesus to kiss him. 48 But Jesus said, "Judas, is it with a kiss that you betray the Son of Man?" Matt 26

Have I ever betrayed a friend, a family member, a member of my church family? Is my stomach churning as I remember it? Am I beginning to sweat; is my face red; does anyone know?

CANDLE 3

Jesus did not call His followers to lead in the same way that others led, by lording it over them. He called those who would come after Him to lead through their service to others. Jesus called those who would follow Him to love as He loved, with more concern for the other person than one's self. We were reminded of that as we watched Jesus washing His disciples' feet.

What is it about humility that is so distasteful? Is it that I think about humiliation and not about humility? How embarrassed would I be if someone came up now and washed my feet? Would I allow it?

CANDLE 4

Keeping watch is an act of love isn't it? We keep watch over children when they are ill. We keep watch over the shallow breathing of elderly parents or spouses and wait for the end. We keep watch for the arrival of loved ones who have travelled to us from a distance. Jesus said this to the disciples: Jesus said to them, "The sorrow in my heart is so great that it almost crushes me. Stay here and keep watch. Mark 14:34

When has it been difficult for me to keep watch over the things of God that have been given to me with mercy and grace? How faithfully do I keep watch with Jesus, through prayer and supplication, as he agonises over my broken and sinful world?

CANDLE 5

The cross is a symbol of God's love that human beings can hardly fathom. We might gladly die for our children, those close to us, for honour or personal glory; but would we do so for an enemy; for someone who had betrayed us, for someone who had slandered us, for someone who had taken advantage of our love, lied and abandoned us?

Yet this evening we heard these words again: *And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples.*" John 13

How do I treat people who think differently from me, who look different from me, who speak a different language than I, who worship differently than I? Did Christ die for them? How do others see me behave in the face of difference?

CANDLE 6

We say good things like "I found Christ..." or "When I was saved ..." or "I try to honour God in my life...", but Jesus says these words: *You did not choose me; I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, the kind of fruit that endures. And so the Father will give you whatever you ask of him in my name. 17 This, then, is what I command you: love one another.* John 15:16-17

Isn't my ultimate purpose in life to honour God by the way I live? Shouldn't I try to share with others the good news that I know to be right and true? Is everything God gives me meant to be offered to the world in Jesus' name and not my name?

CANDLE 7

It was then almost noon of the day before the Passover. Pilate said to the people, "Here is your king!" They shouted back, "Kill him! Kill him! Crucify him!" John 19:14

Graham Kendrick "Peter at the Breaking of the Bread"

Father, thank you that we are no longer in darkness, but we are in the light because of the sufferings that Jesus went through for us on the cross. Help us to live His risen life, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, our soul, our mind and our strength and to love our neighbours as ourselves. Help us to keep that new commandment to Love one another as Jesus has loved us. By your Spirit, help us not to compromise ourselves and Jesus by reflecting what we once were, but in His strength and power, become more like Jesus. In His name we ask this. Amen

Based on "Everyone will Know – A Maundy Thursday Dialogue" by Rina L Terry, UNM GBOD, 2010.