



Maundy Thursday

Whether we consider the story of Holy Thursday in the Synoptic Gospels or Maundy Thursday in the Gospel of John we have a similar message: behave the way I do.

At the conclusion of the washing of the feet, the work of a slave and therefore rather shocking to the apostles, Jesus says, "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." We are to serve each other, in deep humility. If you have ever washed someone else's feet in love or cut their toenails, you will know the lowliness of this service, serving in love.

In the synoptics (and enshrined in the Eucharist Prayer) we have Jesus' instruction: "Do this in memory me." Many scholars have asked what the "this" might mean. Some believe it is the ritual of the bread and wine to be repeated in his memory. Others add a more challenging interpretation. The "this" is referring to the words and the reality of "This is my body, which will be given up for you." "This is the chalice of my blood ... which will be poured out for you ..." What does it cost me to say to all and sundry "This is my body, which will be given up for you?" This is my energy given for you as I do your shopping. This is my time given for you as I listen to your story of abuse for the umpteenth time. This is my self-given for you as I visit you in a nursing home. "This is my body, which will be given up for you." Part of me wants to be prudent and place some limits on the giving, but

then comes the second part: "This is the chalice of my blood which will be poured out for you." This is my life poured out for you in days and weeks devoted to you in a hospice. This is my life poured out for you writing a letter to you every month in prison. This is my life poured out for you dear earth, as I write a protest letter to urge a politician to act on your behalf. "This is the chalice of my blood which will be poured out for you."

But it goes further. Not done in any old way, but done in memory of him, to remember him, to re-member him, in union with him. If we take Paul's words seriously, "I live, no not I, Christ lives in me" then there is a very real sense in which in this oneness with Christ, Christ within me says to all and sundry, as I do: "This is my body, which will be given up for you. This is the chalice of my blood which will be poured out for you."

So, in the stories of Holy Thursday Jesus has two instructions for us: "You also should do as I have done to you" and "Do this in memory of me", both of which mean the same: be servant, be given. Through his love without limit, in his own utterly unselfish heart, Jesus overcame all human selfishness and with it, human sin. It is this self-giving kind of love by which Jesus wishes to be kept alive among us. This is Jesus' dream for each one of us.

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