

Home Worship for Holy Thursday

Jesus and his disciples had stayed in Bethany on Wednesday of Holy Week. That Wednesday night, a woman came to him and anointed him with costly perfume. Jesus tells his disciples this was to prepare him for burial. On Thursday, around noon, Jesus sends his disciples Peter and John to Jerusalem to secure a room and make preparations for the Passover feast. Worship services on Holy Thursday (also called Maundy Thursday) usually focus on events that occurred that night in the upper room where Jesus celebrated the Passover feast with his disciples and the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus prayed, was betrayed by Judas and arrested.

Thursday's events are recorded in Matthew 26:17-75, Mark 14:12-72, Luke 22:7-62, and John 13:1-38.

You may wish to create a worship space in your home as a place of focus with lit candles and items that represent events of this night. For example, you may wish to have a basin and towel in your worship space. In John's Gospel, Jesus washed the disciples' feet, taking on the role of a servant and saying that his followers must emulate him with lives of servanthood. There could be bread and a cup, remembering that Jesus gave us the Lord's Supper on this night. Jesus was betrayed by Judas for 30 pieces of silver, so coins could be a part of your worship space. Creating the space for worship can be an act of worship. Choose a variety of images from this night that are meaningful to you. Below are resources to aid you in your Holy Thursday worship at home. They come from a variety of sources; many I have amended. Some I have retained in the plural voice as a reminder that though we are worshipping in our homes, others are doing the same and that we are together in spirit.

A Service for Worship at Home

Tonight, I Will... (*centering for worship, to be said in the plural if worshipping as a family*)

Tonight, I will remember the love of Jesus,
gathered at table with his friends.
I will remember the bread of life and the cup of blessing he gives.

I will remember the tender service Christ offers at the disciples' feet;
and will receive the challenge of the new commandment: to "Love one another."

I will contemplate the many temptations
of a world that would entice me, like Judas,
to betray the trust of a suffering God.

I will travel with Jesus in the way of the Cross,
so that the Easter "alleluia" will take on new meaning.
I will worship and reflect upon the life of Christ,
that I might remember
what discipleship may cost,
and what it may reap.

In the Upper Room

Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet: John 13:1-20

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. I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfill the scripture, 'The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am he. Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me."

A Prayer of Response:

You knew your hour had come.
You knew your betrayer. You knew your enemies.
You knew that the straw vote would not be in your favor.
But you loved unto the end.
Thank you for loving us, even unto death.
Teach us to love like you love.
Teach us to love each other, to love even our enemies,
like you loved us.

You took on the form of a servant,
washing the feet of those whom you disciplined.
You defined humility and servanthood.
You are he who was surely sent from God.
Thank you for serving for us.
Teach us to be servants without fail;
to make humility our constant companion
and to seek no glory for ourselves.
Remind us when we forget.

On that solemn evening,
you surrounded yourself with friends and enemies,
persons of faith and persons of ill-will.
Help us to be able to always emulate you
when we are surrounded by our friends
and especially when we are surrounded by our enemies.

You have established a “new commandment;”
help us to live it out in every moment,
in every aspect of our lives,
in our families, in our churches, in our communities,
and throughout the world.
On this Holy Day, we gather to remember again
the miracle that you performed in our lives.
You have brought us into the marvelous light.
At great cost to you,
you have given us new life and life eternal. Amen.

Jesus Gives a New Commandment John 13:33-35

(Jesus said) 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.”

A Prayer of Confession

Holy God, you are God of all people,
and my heart is too narrow.
My perspectives are too small.
I reject those who are not like me—
those with different political opinions,
those who struggle with mental illness,
those who disagree with me.
I forget that all are your beloved children,
and I neglect your call to love one another.
Forgive me, O God,
for the many ways I have failed
to love as you have loved me.
Show me how to be more caring.
Teach me how to love without boundaries and conditions,
and make me your faithful disciple. Amen.

In the Garden of Gethsemane

The Garden of Gethsemane: Mark 14:32-42

And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer him. And he came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."

Jesus Prays for His Disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane *(read slowly)*

(This prayer uses a combination of John and Mark's versions of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane)

Sit here while I pray.

The sorrow in my heart is so great, it almost crushes me.

Stay here and keep watch with me.

Father, I have shown your glory on earth;
I have finished the work you gave me.

I have given my disciples your message
And the world ... it hated them.

Yet I don't pray that they may be taken out of the world.
I pray that they may be kept from evil.

(Sound of snoring)

Sleeping, Peter?

Can you not even keep awake for an hour?

Father, I pray not only for my friends,
but for all who believe their words.

I pray that they may be one,
just as you and I are one.

Father, the world does not know you,
But I know you and they know you.

So that the world may believe that you sent me,
May they be one ... may they be one.

(Sound of snoring)

Peter, keep watch and pray.
Don't be drawn by temptation.
The spirit is willing, but, oh, the flesh ... the flesh is weak.

Father, if it is possible...
take away his cup of suffering from me...
take away this cup of suffering from me...
but let it not be what I want.
let it be what you want.

(Sound of snoring)

Are you still sleeping?
Are you still at your ease?
The hour has come for the Son of Man
to be handed over to sinful people.
Get up, let us go!
Look, here comes the one who is to betray me....

The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus: Mark 14:43-50

Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled." All of them deserted him and fled.

Jesus is Arrested, a Personal Reflection and Prayer

If I were arrested and held this night
what would I be found guilty of?

That I made friends with people
irrespective of their color, creed or class?
That I shared my bread with the poor?
That my words... and actions... brought healing and forgiveness?
That I made justice and didn't count the cost?
That I sought the truth and then spoke of it?
That I recognized my neighbor
and loved them as my very self?
That I met God along the way
in the healing and forgiveness I received?
That I accepted hospitality at many different tables?
That I was changed by the lives of others
...and often repented my arrogance and foolishness
in encountering their wisdom?
That I never sought out suffering
...but journeyed with it to the best of my ability?

That the love of those about me
taught me to love myself before God?

You call me out of brokenness
to mend and remake me.
Grant me the courage to stay
with all those who are held captive this night.
In the name of Jesus who is good news. Amen.

A Closing Prayer of Thanksgiving for Others

For all those who have gone before me,
walked the path I tread,
and, by their example,
encouragement,
wise words and teaching
led others into your Kingdom,
I offer my grateful thanks.
For all who, through their actions
put others before self,
demonstrating the meaning
of generosity,
giving from their riches
and also from their poverty,
I offer my grateful thanks.
This I pray in the name of Jesus Christ,
who gave everything, that we might
understand the true
riches of this life,
and the one to come
Amen.