
Exodus 12. 1-4, 11-14	The Passover
John 13.1-17, 31b-35	The Last Supper
I Corinthians 11.23-25	The holy communion

Today we are marking the first of the three great days of Easter, commemorating the night in which Jesus showed us both the way to live and the way to face death – we are to live to love, to serve others, and we are to face death in trust and hope, knowing that we are returning to the God who created us.

Tonight our local Anglican church at Riverwood is celebrating these momentous events by offering everyone a dinner of roasted lamb, but it's being careful not to suggest it will be anyone's last supper.

This year, the three Abrahamic religions have their great commemorations at the same time -- Western Easter this weekend, Eastern Easter next weekend, the two Easters coincide only every fourth year; faithful Jews begin the commemoration of the Passover tomorrow, and we are already in Ramadan, which runs from 1st April until 1st May. It's a tense time in Jerusalem, especially just outside the Damascus Gate.

Sadly, for most people, this weekend will be just like any other, or it will be simply more time to go to the show, or to the races, or to the football. That is their great loss.

Tonight we read three passages of Scripture, written centuries apart, as one reading, as a reminder that Jesus' last night on earth is part of the one redemptive story of God's work in the world, from the garden of creation to the city of salvation, a story which we are part of, a story whose final chapter is still to be played out.

The first passage introduces the symbolism of commemorating the goodness of God by eating a special food, or food prepared in a special way. And the symbolism of blood shed to atone for human sin. The Passover was to begin a new way of marking time – the civil year might begin in the autumn, after the harvest, but the **first** month of the year, the most important month of the year, was now to be the month of their deliverance. The Jews now had a civil calendar and a religious calendar, as we have. Our church year begins with the Advent of our Deliverer.

The Gospel reading is part of John's dramatic story of Jesus' last night on earth. This is no ordinary meal, this is the beginning of the end of the supreme revelation of the nature of God, as other-serving love. As his disciples, we are commanded to love others in the same way as he did, but hopefully not to the same extent.

The third passage, a few verses from Paul's letter to the young church in Corinth, has become the core of the Great Thanksgiving in every communion liturgy – they remind us that that the holy communion is both the gift and the commandment of our Lord Jesus.

The context is important. Paul is writing to the Corinthians commending them for keeping the faith handed on to them. But one thing he could not commend was the way they were sharing the Lord's Supper. Apparently they had made the sacrament part of a so-called love feast, perhaps a dinner of roasted lamb, not the simple symbolic meal we are familiar with.

Today we shall eat a small piece of bread and take a small sip of wine, as symbols of Jesus' body and blood, as we do every Sunday. Today the bread will be newly-baked unleavened bread, as a symbol of the haste with which the Jews had to leave their land of slavery. They had no time to wait for the bread to rise.

Peter will wash Bruce's feet as a symbol of Jesus' washing the feet of all his disciples, and we shall end the service by stripping the altar as a reminder that tomorrow's solemn service commemorating Good Friday does not include Holy Communion. These traditions go back to the earliest years of the church.

Paul was concerned that the church in Corinth had forgotten the symbolic significance of the holy meal. *For, when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk.* This not our problem, it would be hard to get drunk on the small sip we will be given, but we can receive the bread and wine unworthily, as the Prayer Book puts it -- our thoughts may wander, or we may chatter while others are taking the bread and the wine, instead of using the time to pray to God in worshipful silence.

Some priests lead the service unworthily as well, they read the words too quickly, or they mumble, as if they want to get it over with. The true priests are those who bring the words to life by reading them with a sense of awe and wonder, as if they were saying them for the first time. Every holy communion is a new call to examine ourselves and to amend our lives, again using the words of the Prayer Book..

As Paul told the people of Corinth, *whoever eats the bread of the Lord or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord.* That is, they become his enemies rather than his friends.

Tonight's few verses begin, *I received from the Lord what I handed on to you.* Paul is saying that he received the truth directly from Jesus, and he insists in letter after letter that *the gospel which I preached was neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ* (Gal.1.11-12). Paul is speaking from personal experience, unlike so many people who call themselves Christians, their allegiance is only nominal, they know **about** Jesus, they may respect Jesus but they do not **know** Jesus.

But Paul did not simply receive the good news, he spent his life handing it on. Like his master, he is a model for all of us. Too many regular churchgoers are simply consumers of the Gospel, rather than ministers of the Gospel, they fail to pass on what they have received, the good news of the unbounded love of God.

So, how do we best honour the momentous events we commemorate this night? By honouring Jesus' serving us in life and in death, and recognising that we are ones for whom he died.

How do we live? In obedience to his command to love others as he loved us. And by following Paul's example, passing on the Gospel we have received

How do we face death? In the confidence that God's love never ends. *Now we see God in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face.* (1 Cor. 13:8-13)

Lord, we thank you for loving us as we are. Help us to be better, by growing in our love for others and for you. AMEN.