



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Maundy Thursday 2020 7 pm

On the things people have missed most during these days of semi-lockdown has been being with friends.

People have longed for a hand to hold, a familiar face to greet with a kiss, and no matter how adept we have become at using Skype or FaceTime or Zoom and other video conferencing tools, simply being with someone on the same space cannot be replicated.

On this day, Jesus is with his friends in the Upper Room in Jerusalem and he is with us, wherever we are, however deep or far-flung our isolation because of the ravages of the pernicious Covid-19 virus.

We must allow him to wash our feet in welcome, and recline at the table with him; with him and his disciples we must take time just to relish being in his presence, to rehearse our shared stories, to remember better, happier times and to look forward to happier times yet to come.

Jesus us invites us to dip our bread into the same dishes as he does; to drink liberally from the same cup from which he drinks, to treasure our friendship with the One in whom, and through whom and by whom, we see something of the seeds of God's long-awaited and long-promised Kingdom coming to fruit on earth.

Yet, this is gathering of friends where all is not well.

Why is Jesus kneeling down and washing our feet; why is our teacher and master, assume the role of servant when he is our host?

Why did Judas leave the party so early, when we had all that we needed? Jesus had provided for our every need. What was there left for Judas to go and do?

And, why, most worryingly of all, why does Jesus say that the bread he now blesses, breaks and gives us is his 'body' and what is this about the extra cup of wine that he has passed around and calls his 'blood'?

In 2020, we can look back on the events of the first Holy Week and set each event in a much broader context; with the hindsight of 2000 years of Christian history behind us.

We know that the all the events which has been unfolding since Christ's entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, find their resolution not in the defeat and ignominy of the cross on Good

Friday, which will see all the friends scattered and in search of hiding places to lay low, but in the empty tomb of Easter which lies beyond that.

For the first disciples, and for the crowds gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, the events of that first Holy Week were lived out in real time.

The disciple-friends of Jesus had no way of knowing that their supper with Jesus would be their last with him.

The disciple-friends of Jesus had no idea as they sat with him at Supper that following their increasingly enigmatic meal with Jesus would come the painful embarrassment of falling asleep, as they were supposed to be keeping a lookout in Gethsemane, nor did they have any inkling that they would have to face the ignominy and humiliation of running away from their dearest friend when angry mob-driven soldiers would arrive to arrest him.

Every time we sit and eat with our friend and brother Jesus, we share the bread and drink the wine of the Eucharist.

And we both 'recall' all of our shame, our ficklenesses, our betrayals and our guilt **AND** like the disciples, we find our forgiveness for these, and all, shameful things; we find our healing, our wholeness, our restoration in and through Christ Jesus our friend and our God.

Every time we share the bread and drink the wine of the Eucharist; we proclaim his death and resurrection; every time we share the bread and drink the wine of the Eucharist, Jesus lives in us and through us and we become his body and his blood.

Every time we share the bread and drink the wine of the Eucharist, we are reminded that now it is we who must kneel and wash the feet of others; that it is we who must enact the Kingdom in word and deed; that we, having died with Christ to sin on the cross, must now live the eternal life of Easter, filled with the power of Pentecost and with Jesus, our friend, redeemer and brother always, everywhere at our sideⁱ. Amen.

ⁱ cf. Prayer of St Richard of Chichester

Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits thou hast given me,
for all the pains and insults thou hast borne for me.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know thee more clearly,
love thee more dearly,
and follow thee more nearly, day by day.
Amen.