

Maundy Thursday Reflective Worship

This reflective service for Maundy Thursday was first used in 2016 to provide a new alternative to a Tenebrae liturgy. It includes prayers and meditations, and leads into Holy Communion. The liturgy focuses upon the account of the Last Supper in John 13. Seven candles are lit during the service in response to seven actions, which are noted during the narrative. The lit candles offer a reminder of the presence of light even in the darkness of the eve of Good Friday. You will need to have your Bible opened at John 13:1 to begin.

Opening prayer:

Leader: Let us pray together ...

**All: God of light and truth,
grant us peace as we gather tonight.
May we draw closer to you as we recall again
the service and suffering of Christ,
in whose name we meet and pray**

God of grace and truth,
as we move from the brightness of the day's light to the enfolding darkness of the night-time,
help us to know your light in our hearts, that in our need for forgiveness and strength your gracious
word may be known.
name of Christ we pray.
**And then help us to go from this place renewed in spirit.
In the name of Christ we pray. Amen**

Prayer of confession and assurance:

Lord Christ, in the evening of this day, forgive us for our lack of attention to you,
our absence of word and action in following you, and our denial of your place within our lives ...

Silence for personal confession

Help us to know your Spirit with us, your gracious forgiveness,
and your strength in our hearts,
That we may more closely follow you. Amen

Introduction to the Gospel reading (John 13) and candle-lighting:

This evening we shall hear part of John's account of the last evening that Jesus spent with his friends before his arrest. Chapter 13 speaks of actions taken, and decisions made. Some were inspired by goodness, and others not. As the words are read we consider where our place might be within the narrative, and we renew our hope, which is in Christ the light of the world, that through him we might come closer to God.

Action 1 – washing, John 13: 1–5:

Let us pray:

Tonight, O God, we recall that your Son arose from the table to descend to the floor.
We rejoice that in his humility he left the things of heaven
for the dirt and dust of this world. Give us humility, we pray,
that we might discover and follow Christ's way and not our own. Lord, hear us.
Lord, fill us with your truth.

The first candle is lit, followed by pause for reflection ...

Action 2 – cleansing, John 13: 6–11:

Meditation:

Feet are not everyone's cup of tea! To take water and wash the feet of the old, the sick, the poor, to take that intimate step of closeness, and to do so in a matter-of-fact way, is a marked act of service. And to have one's own feet washed can be accompanied by a painful sense of lost independence, as another does for you what you cannot do for yourself. Again and again we become clean through water and through forgiveness. But again and again the cleansing grace of God finds its challenge through our words and actions, our lack of words and lack of action. And then, once again, we need that cleansing grace.

Christ comes and kneels and cleanses us that we might be whole. 'Unless I wash you, you have no part of me,' Jesus says to Peter, and Jesus says that to you and me as well.

Let us pray:

Lord God, help us to accept love when it is shown, and your love as it is shown through Christ.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, cleanse us through your grace.

The second candle is lit, followed by pause for reflection ...

Action 3 – serving, John 13: 12–17:**Meditation:**

To sort out the seating plan for a wedding can be a nightmare. Who might be offended by not being included on the top table? Who should be seated near that table? Who wouldn't mind sitting with the children? Our egos can be massaged by the importance placed upon us.

Jesus lowered himself to the floor and spoke about servants and messengers being no greater than the master ... and yet the one whom we serve came to serve. 'Do you know what I have done for you?' Jesus asks. Well, do we? 'If you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them,' says Jesus.

This night we recall the blessedness of following Christ. The blessedness not of a throne or palace. Not a promise of ease. Not a satin cloak. But a towel and a basin, and a crown of thorns and a cross. A way of blessed service here and now, and the promise of peace to come.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, teach us how to serve as we are served. Lord, hear us.

Lord, fill us with your humble love.

The third candle is lit, followed by pause for reflection

Action 4 – betraying, John 13: 18–30:**Let us pray:**

Loving God, we pray for those who are persecuted and betrayed for their faith.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, fill us with your strength.

The fourth candle is lit, followed by pause for reflection ...

Action 5 – leaving, John 13: 31–33:**Let us pray:**

Jesus told his disciples that he was going to prepare a place for them.

In silence we remember those who have gone before us, who have brought the Gospel to us, who have served Christ amongst us, and who now are in that place prepared also for us.

Silence

Lord, hear us.

Lord, fill us with your hope.

The fifth candle is lit, followed by pause for reflection ...

Action 6 – loving, John 13: 34–35:

Let us pray:

Jesus commanded his disciples to love,
even as he knew that betrayal and denial were close at hand.

We pray for those who are rejected and unloved ...

We pray for those who are betrayed by those whom they love ...

We pray for those who deny their faith through fear ...

We pray for those who this night, and every night, fear for their lives ...

We pray for those for whom this night will be their last ... Lord, hear us.

Lord, fill us with your compassionate love.

The sixth candle is lit, followed by pause for reflection ...

Action 7 – denying, John 13: 36–38:

Meditation:

There was only one other person waiting as he arrived. The owner was speaking to the man in the chair as he cut his hair. There were strangers in the street, he said. There was a different accent to their voice. A different manner to their dress. It was like being in a foreign land. The waiting customer nodded with a smile and said nothing.

She was with her friends, and the joke she retold was one heard earlier in the day. It was mild in comparison to some, but not so to those who knew the pain of disability or the rejection of difference. The girls laughed, and her closest friend smiled quietly, but said nothing.

He was on his way home after an early appointment, and the driver laughed as he passed the congregation leaving the synagogue. 'Look at them!' he said. His passenger, visible in the mirror, turned away to look out of the side window, but said nothing.

Let us pray:

O God, you know that it is often easier and safer for us to remain silent when we might challenge.
To speak with quiet voices when they need to be louder.

Help us, we pray, re-call us to your service

as Christ recalled your servant Peter by the lakeside, that we may be fed ... and then feed others.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, fill us with your courage, your love and your humility.

Help us in the night-time shadows of fear

to know the continuing light of your presence, that we may be seen and heard as your people.

Amen

The seventh candle is lit, followed by pause for reflection ...

Here in this moment of time and in this place,

Christ is present with us as even though we cannot share bread and wine.

Therefore, O God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us,
that we may be his body in this world.

Amen

Lord's Prayer (together)

Christ invites us to share in bread and wine,
and we will, together one day, God willing
Christ invites us to share in service and humility.

Christ invites us to share in strength and renewal.
We pray together in faith.

Prayer

Let us pray:

We give you thanks and praise, O God, that even in the darkness of this night, your light shines.

We rejoice that we will again share with Christ around his table, God willing, and we pray for his strength as we continue to be his body in this world.

Amen

Closing words: Mark 14: 32–34:

There is no final blessing tonight, as the events continue into tomorrow and then to Easter morning resurrection.

The candles remain lit as a sign of hope, and we go quietly into the night.

by Stephen J Maunder

Sources:

Passages from NRSV copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Seven Actions

by Stephen J Maunder

PL10460

ISBN: 978-1-84952-538-1

Published 2017: Wild Goose Publications

21 Carlton Court, Glasgow, G5 9JP, UK,

the publishing division of the Iona Community.

Scottish Charity No. SC003794.

Limited Company Reg. No. SC096243 www.ionabooks.com

© Stephen J Maunder

Cover photo © Olejnik | Dreamstime.com

All rights reserved. Apart from reasonable personal use on the purchaser's own system and related devices, no part of this document or file(s) may be reproduced or transmitted in any form, by any means, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Non-commercial use: The material in this document may be used non-commercially for worship and group work without written permission from the publisher.

Please make full acknowledgement of the source and where appropriate report usage to the CLA or other copyright organisation.

Commercial use: For any commercial use of this material, permission in writing must be obtained in advance from Wild Goose Publications at the above address.

Stephen J Maunder has asserted his right in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work.

2021

This reflective worship service is again being used for Easter 2021, while COVID-19 Restrictions of more than yearlong continue to prohibit other traditional seasonal experiences (like washing of feet, or ash crosses on foreheads).

And so we are led into new experiences and insights. We gratefully acknowledge provision of this version by Rev Peter Cannon and the Macedon Ranges Partnership of the Uniting Church. Whitehorse Uniting Cluster – Easter 2021.