

MAUNDY THURSDAY

This “meal” is an informal gathering. I would like to set the background to this “meal”, for all of us to appreciate the significance, the gravity and the consequence of this event, this “meal”. And then we shall participate in the meal, turning our conversation to what we experience and why.

There are not many events recorded in the history of the world, which connect politics and religion, which records and sheds light on, the struggle between the power structures of this world, and the power of God.

This confrontation is not new. Somewhere in eternity past, Jesus saw satan fall from heaven like lightning (Luke 10:18). Whilst we do not yet understand what really happened, we are made aware that the struggle to wrest power from God, is a real war.

There are three outstanding moments in the History of God as documented in the Bible: (1) the call of **Abraham**, (2) the **Exodus** and (3) the reign of **David**.

To **Abraham** God promised numerous descendants and a land for them to live in as their own. That promise was not fulfilled in his lifetime.

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By the time of the **Exodus**, the descendants of Abraham were a people, waiting to become a nation, the promised land of Canaan.

Mere crossing of the Jordan into Canaan did not accomplish the purposes of God, for the land had to be conquered. When **David** was King, Israel was given security from all her surrounding enemies.

This evening, ours is the story of Exodus, which is also the story of Redemption and Salvation. God's people are held as bonded labourers by a powerful king and theirs' is a life of misery.

This king does not like the Hebrew people whom he needs to build monuments to mark his kingdom, but at the same time he loathes, because they appear to be healthier than his people. His instruction is that all boy-babies born to Hebrew women, should be drowned in the river Nile, but one couple hid their baby boy, until it was no longer possible to hide him and so his mother set him among the bulrushes in the Nile. Pharaoh's daughter arrives with her retinue, discovers the "Moses Basket", recognises the baby as a Hebrew child, agrees that a wet nurse (actually the baby's mother) wean the child, offers to pay her for her service, and adopts the Hebrew boy as her own when he is a bit older.

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God plans are from eternity to eternity. It appears from the account, Pharaoh was unaware that God had planted a Hebrew child in his palace, the significance of which has eternal ramifications.

When God commissions Moses to go tell Pharaoh, ***“Let my people go”***, Moses does not need permission to enter the palace; he has full access to the Pharaoh, being the adopted son of the Princess! God has set the stage.

God raises His “Messiah” Moses, in the palace of the Pharaoh, the oppressor of God’s people!

After several months, perhaps even a year, of going back to Pharaoh and trying to extract a promise to let the Hebrew people go, he finally relents.

God then says to Moses, ***Now get ready! Today is to be the first day of the first month in your calendar. ... let the head of each family take a one-year-old male sheep or goat with no defects.*** God asked them to chose the best of the flock, and on the 14th day, the entire Hebrew community would slaughter the animal at twilight, collect the blood in a basin, make a brush using a fistful of hyssop, dip it in the blood and smear it on the sides and the top (the lintel) of the doorframe of the house in which they would eat the lamb. No one is to go out through the door until God Himself accompanies the

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Angel of death, striking down everyone in the land of Egypt, expect for those covered by the marked blood of the Lamb.

There were several other instructions about being prepared and ready to leave, about who could eat the "Passover meal", what to do with left overs and much more.

***"This is a day to remember. Each year, from generation to generation, you must celebrate it as a special festival to the Lord. This is a law for all time."* (Exodus 12:14)**

Every year, on the 14th day of the first month in the Hebrew calendar, the Passover is celebrated. It is eagerly anticipated, planned for and carefully prepared.

Fast forward 1,500 years.

Jesus is moving towards Jerusalem, His final encounter between the strong arm of the state, the power of self appointed religious leaders, and the absolute power of God.

Jesus says to His Disciples, "I have longed to eat **this** meal with **YOU**". Normally family members and other poorer close relatives would be expected to attend a Passover meal, but Jesus has plans; this one is only for "The Twelve" to be present around the table.

Food was never for the self (that is gluttony, what the Romans and the Greeks indulged in). Food was always for everyone

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who was present at mealtime, and included inviting the poor and needy, known to the family.

Before we get involved in the meal itself, we need to prepare for it.

FIRST, please take and eat a spring of bitter herbs (rocket leaves). As you do, remember any bitterness in your heart, bitterness against a person whom you think has hurt you in any way, and surrender that bitterness to God; asking Him to release you from it, and He will.

Some people, unknown to them, harbour a bitterness against God. Life has not been the way you wanted it. Things have not gone according to your plan. You thought it was what God wanted for you, but you misunderstood. God had a better plan for you, but it was not what you wanted.

Submit this bitterness to God, ask for His forgiveness, and then ask to be bathed by His love.

NEXT, dip your finger in the bowl of salt water, and taste it. The salt reminds you of tears. Perhaps your words, your actions, your deeds, sometimes your insensitivity has driven someone to tears. Perhaps you know the person, or maybe you do not remember hurting anyone.

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Submit your Sprit to God, asking to be cleansed of everything which has brought tears to someone else.

Surrender yourself to the mercy of God, and ask God to release that person from the agony of tears, into a season of joy.

The **HOST** at this table, invites you to join Him for a meal. He welcomes you at the door and wants to wash your feet. *Unless I wash your feet, you will have no part with me...*

We don't like our feet being washed by someone else unless it is the podiatrist or the beauty salon. By our Host has the spirit of a **Servant - I am here to serve you, not to feed you, nor to show you how much I have, nor my generosity. I want to welcome you to my home, and hope you feel comfortable and at ease. I want to share with you, whatever I have, everything God has blessed me with.**

There is dialogue and banter. The HOST does all He can to welcome His guests and put them at ease. Dialogue is an important part of making someone comfortable.

Then comes the food.

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The HOST has a plan. He is participating in a ritual meal, with those for whom each item on the table has social and religious meaning. This meal is their total identity: as a special people, they were delivered from bondage to an evil and oppressive king, to freedom in their promised homeland.

The HOST has a plan. He was about to do something no one had ever done before, and no one ever could - ***There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends***

In a matter of hours, the lives of 12 men will change forever. They had seen Jesus, they were taught by Him and they learned from Him, they were fed by Him and ate with Him, **and** they were soon to be witness of His death **AND** resurrection, proof that He had conquered death.

To the many, many generations people who in the future would come to believe Jesus was God's promised Messiah, they needed something to remind them of God's plan love, that He surrendered to death, His Son, that anyone and everyone who believes He did this as His act of love, will be restored and welcomed into the eternal relationship they had with Him, in the beginning.

There are **three** items on the table which are a lasting legacy of God's plan for us: **Bread, Lamb and Wine.**

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Our usual practice is to **remember** the death of Jesus with “broken” **BREAD** reminding us of Jesus’ body that was surrendered to death and broken in death, and the resurrection of the Christ in the cup of **WINE**, reminding us of healing, joy, celebration - healing of our present brokenness and healing of our relationship with God through Christ.

Have you ever wondered, of all the food items on the table, why did Jesus choose bread to signify His body?

Why didn't He say, ***This stalk of celery is my body; every time you break it, remember my body was broken for you***”, or This grape, or this olive represents my body; every time you squish it, remember my body was beaten and broken for you?

The **ONLY** way to be a part of the Life of Christ in this world, is to recognise **the Lamb that was Slain**, whose blood marks us and protects us from the wrath of God against sin.

When the Hebrew people ate Lamb at the Passover meal, they took the bread, broke it and wrapped it around the Lamb, in order to eat it. The Lamb that was Slain, was perfect in every way - He gave His life, that His blood would protect us from the anger of God against sin, from eternal death.

At the Passover table with the 12, The Lamb whose blood would identify them was sitting across the table - but they did not know it. So Jesus says, This is my body, broken for you.

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The **blood of the Lamb** protects us from eternal death, **for eternal life!**

Which is the reason why it is called the cup of hope - "This cup that is poured out for you, is the new covenant in my blood" ([Luke 22:20](#)).

In the Bible, a **covenant** is something God promises to do, and exists in perpetuity, even overriding the Law!

e.g. the covenant we had over parking rights.

The old covenant was re-enacted every time by the slaughter of the Lamb to remind us of God's protection.

In the **NEW COVENANT**, there is no need to sacrifice a lamb to remind us of God's protection and love.

Tonight we shall eat lamb, with bread and other embellishment, and drink from the cup, **ALL** to remind us Jesus the Christ, died once and for all time. He does not hang on the cross anymore - the cross and the grave are empty, proof of Christ's victory over death!

Our lives are not a testimony of the crucified Christ, our lives are a testimony of the resurrected Christ!

AMEN