

Maundy Thursday: “Always and everywhere”
Bible readings: Exodus 12.1-14; Matthew 26.17-30

*Jesus said, “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him,
 The Teacher says, My time is near;
 I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.”*

Today of all days, it feels specially hard that we can't go to church. This is the day when we remember Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper, the night before he died — the sacramental gift by which he has nourished his church ever since. This is the day when, ever since I was ordained twenty years ago, I have joined my fellow clergy and lay ministers at the Cathedral for the Chrism Eucharist and renewal of vocation. This is the day when we remember that first “Last Supper,” and the earthly Jesus' final hours with his disciples — the foot-washing, the high-priestly prayer, the sharing of bread and wine. This is the day when (echoing the language of the Passover) we say:

At the Eucharist we are with our crucified and risen Lord. We know that it was not only our ancestors but we who were redeemed and brought forth from bondage to freedom, from mourning to feasting. We know that as he was with them in the upper room, so our Lord is here with us now.

And the congregation responds:

Until the Kingdom of God comes, let us celebrate the feast.

So where is “here”?

Normally, we would be saying those words in church.

But the Last Supper wasn't celebrated in church — or even in the Temple. The meal Matthew describes was a Passover meal, a family meal that people would normally celebrate in their own homes. Jesus and his disciples didn't have a home in Jerusalem, but Jesus had made careful preparations to find a room: *The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.*

Passover was always a family festival, celebrating Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt, household by household. It belongs in the home: it has its own liturgy, woven around the family rituals and family treasures. At Passover, the home becomes “sacred space”. It speaks powerfully of the sanctification of ordinary space, everyday places: the hearth, the kitchen table. The most intimate spaces of our lives, the places where our lives are lived (now more than ever, when so many of us are isolated or working from home) — transfigured and hallowed, ritually cleansed, open to guests — and open to God.

But it also opens out to a wider world. Passover is designed to be celebrated by the extended family and invited guests: it's a very elastic and hospitable festival. It always retains a sense of incompleteness, of being in exile. That's built into the original Exodus story — eating in haste, standing, shoes on your feet, household all packed up and ready to go. It is a feast of sending out, not of settling down. “Next year in Jerusalem” is a refusal to accept exile as “normal”. For the pilgrim crowds

which flocked to Jerusalem, even being in the holy city was just a foretaste, a glimpse of God's future. And that sense of expectation is echoed in Jesus' words: "*I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom*" (Matt 26.29).

I am always struck by the words of the Prayer Book communion service, especially when I say it in a care home or hospital ward: "It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty that we should *at all times and in all places* give thanks unto thee, O Lord ...". And the miracle is that he does make himself known to us in the breaking of the bread, *always and everywhere, at all times and in all places*: in church, by a hospital bed, in a refugee camp, in a prison cell— or in the solitude of our homes. Strangest of all, perhaps, over the airwaves of virtual space (but why should that be so strange?), he will find a way to make himself known to us — to make his home in our hearts as we reach out to him in love: *The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.*

God bless you — always and everywhere, and especially as we celebrate Easter this weekend, apart and yet together:

Loveday