

Maundy Thursday 2021

Luke 22:39-46

4/1/21

Maundy Thursday is a day loaded with important events that shaped and still shape the Christian church to this day. They include Jesus' "new commandment" that the disciples love one another. Jesus washing the disciples' feet and calling them to serve one another. The institution of the Lord's Supper. The betrayal and arrest of Jesus. And Jesus' prayer at Gethsemane. It's challenging for a preacher to know what to focus on!

In addition, I believe that a Maundy Thursday service is as much about reflection and liturgical actions as it is about words, so I will keep my comments very brief tonight. Later in the service, we'll let the scriptures speak for themselves as they describe the many events of Maundy Thursday. For now, listen to these words from Luke 22:39-46. ³⁹*(Jesus) came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. ⁴⁰When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial." ⁴¹Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, ⁴²"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." ⁴³Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. ⁴⁴In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. ⁴⁵When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of*

grief, ⁴⁶and he said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.” (Lk. 22:39-46)

All of this takes place right after the Last Supper. Jesus then leaves the city of Jerusalem, crosses the Kidron valley, and walks up to the Mount of Olives, where many people had private gardens. Jesus had apparently gotten permission from the owner to use this particular garden for prayer and sleep, and did so frequently when he was in Jerusalem, probably enjoying the cooler temperatures there instead of staying in the crowded city. Jesus, a man of prayer, instructs the disciples to pray that they not come into a time of persecution and then proceeds to pray the same thing for himself. He seems to have a very good idea of what’s coming: betrayal, abandonment by his friends, scourging, and crucifixion. And worst of all, the separation from his heavenly Father.

He is obviously overwhelmed with anxiety and fear about what is to come. This is one of our best pictures of the human side of Jesus, a man who was subject to the same fears and weaknesses that threaten to overwhelm us. Our creeds speak of Jesus as fully God and fully human. This belief is not just an abstraction. It provides real comfort and confidence to us in the midst of our own grief, sorrow, and fear, because we know that God understands exactly what that is like, and identifies with us in our pain. This is part of the good news of the gospel.

Finally, after pleading that “this cup” be taken away, Jesus affirms that he will obey God- “your will be done,” he says. Since Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross was an act of love, Jesus is demonstrating that love is often costly, in this case, costing his life. Our love for others can also be costly. Think of new parents desperate for sleep. Caregivers of all kinds feeling exhausted. Church elders giving of their time and dealing with disagreements. Deacons reaching out to homebound people and others. Volunteers of all kinds who give of their time and energy to make our community a better place. Love can be costly, but if that is what God calls us to do, then that is what we must do. Jesus set the example for us.

So, keeping Jesus’ prayer in mind, after the anthem we will respond to Jesus’ invitation to the Lord’s Supper, confident that he waits for us, understands us, cares for us, and desires to empower us to do his work.