



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Maundy Thursday
April 18, 2019

[RCL] Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14; Psalm 116:1, 10-17; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Exodus 12:1-4 (5-10), 11-14

“Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the feast.” Many Episcopalians are familiar with these words, and Maundy Thursday starts off by reminding us where the image comes from. God’s commandments about the first Passover are no more graphic than the language we use at the communion rail every Sunday, but the context is just different enough to be jarring. The blood of the Passover lamb is what marks the Hebrews as the people whom God is liberating from Egypt, and the slaughter of the lamb takes place in the context of a family meal, albeit an unusual one. As the Church invites us into the Triduum, we start by finding ourselves alongside the ancient Hebrews at the first Passover and Jesus with his disciples at the Last Supper: God’s chosen ones sharing a meal on the brink of salvation.

- Where is your Egypt? From what are you being liberated?
- How does your participation in the Eucharist mark you as part of God’s people?

Psalm 116:1, 10-17

Psalm 116 is one of the traditional psalms sung on major Jewish holidays and was almost certainly sung by Jesus and his disciples after the Last Supper (Matthew 26:30, Mark 14:26). In this context, the imagery is rich: “I will lift up the cup of salvation... Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his servants... I am your servant and the child of your handmaid.” Even though Jesus understood that his betrayal was imminent, the words of the psalm are couched in language of rejoicing and thanksgiving for God’s saving acts. This structure gives us a way into the psalm in our own day. Having been freed from our bonds, how shall we repay God for all the good things God has done for us? As for the psalmist, so for us in the Eucharist: by offering a “sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving” and “our selves, our souls and bodies” (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 335-36).

- Do you find one lens on this psalm more compelling than the other?
- Twice the psalmist speaks of fulfilling vows to God. How do your baptismal vows inform the way you give thanks to God?

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

First Corinthians was written before the Gospels, making this is the oldest occurrence in the Bible of Jesus's words at the Last Supper. Paul emphasizes the role of oral tradition up to this point: what he has received, he has passed on, and this letter only serves as a reminder to the Corinthians. Paul also reminds them that sharing the bread and cup is a proclamation of Christ's death "until he comes," which in Paul's mind was very soon. By proclaiming this death, the believers are reminding themselves of their union with that death and the salvation it brings (see Romans 6). As Paul explores in the verses surrounding this passage, the Church's union in Christ through the Eucharist is a serious matter with real-life ramifications like treating other believers with respect and giving due reverence to the presence of Christ in the Sacrament.

- How has Christian faith been passed down to you?
- What ways do you see the unity of the Church playing out in the life of your community?

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

John is the only of the canonical Gospels not to include Jesus's commandment regarding the bread and cup; instead, John focuses on the foot-washing, a scene not present in the other Gospels. Some have speculated that this act is an allusion to baptism. The act of Jesus washing his disciples' feet would have been just as shocking as Jesus' words about eating his body and blood—this task was considered so debasing that Jewish people were not allowed to require it of other Jews, even if they were enslaved. Jesus sets an example of being willing to upend social conventions in order to care for the needs of another, and his interaction with Peter admonishes us not to be too proud to allow ourselves to be cared for. All are of equal rank and dignity in the community of the baptized; no one is too good to do the work that needs doing and no one is unworthy of attention and care. By extending this principle to all parts of the life of the Christian community, those on the outside will know that we are truly a people set apart by God.

- If your community observes foot-washing on Maundy Thursday, who does the washing: leaders only or the whole congregation? How does this choice illustrate the lesson Jesus teaches in this passage?
- Is there a pattern in your life of not allowing others to care for your needs? Are you quick to let others do the "dirty work"? What are some adjustments you could make in light of Jesus' example?

Hailing from the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania, Noah Stansbury is a middler at the School of Theology at the University of the South. He is an Episcopal Service Corps alumnus and holds a bachelor's degree in biblical studies. Two of his great loves are cats and collecting books he will never have time to read.