

## Morning Introduction:



Today is Holy Thursday, the day in Holy Week where we tell the stories of Jesus gathering his friends together in an upper room.

It was the night before he died.

It was before he was arrested.

It might have been the night they were going to celebrate a Passover meal together.

It could have been any night.

Like any family supper, they gathered with hopes and fears, with tense and intense relationships.

They didn't know it was the last supper.

Throughout this holy day, I will post three prayers inviting us to that upper room: one prayer at 12:00 noon; one at 3:00 pm; one at 6:00 pm. If you want to print out the prayers and read them throughout the day, it is under Resources: Documents: Sermon Texts.

Prayer at 12:00 noon



*John 13:3-5, 34 - Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him... I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.*

O God, we give you thanks that Jesus made the point so plainly. Not just words about service, not just a Google image. But to put on the clothes of a servant as his friends assembled for the supper. To kneel down at their feet. To wash their feet with his own two hands and not worry about how long it took. Lovingly, carefully, thoughtfully preparing them for the evening that was to come. Then telling them that the act of service was love – it was God's love – as certain as his hands on their feet.

Are we ready to be known as servants and not masters, O God? You have prepared the way with the story, and this commandment to love through service. You have prepared our hearts and cleansed our every fear with compassion.

Give us humility, O God, that we may walk with Jesus, robed as servants, ready to welcome, and care, and serve your children in creation. Amen

Prayer at 3:00 pm:



*Psalm 116:12-14 - What shall I return to the LORD for all God's bounty to me?  
I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD,  
I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all God's people.*

O God, when Jesus raised the cup at the table, and got their attention, and stilled their chatter, their posturing, their bickering, did the disciples stop and listen? Did they hear the pain in Jesus' voice? Did they see his hand tremble with emotion? Did they understand that the new covenant he promised them meant an ending, a farewell to all that they knew, a death before the resurrection?

O God, when we come to a holy day like today, do we listen for what is new or different? Do we open ourselves to your leading? Do we even know that we might be grieving?

Give us courage, we pray, to raise our own cup in thanksgiving, as we ponder the meaning of every word offered: Blessed are you, O God, creator of the universe – creator of the fruit of the vine. When we drink of it, let us remember him. Amen

Prayer at 6:00 pm:



*John 14:15-21 - 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. 'I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.'*

O God, it really is all about love, isn't it? This prayer that Jesus prayed with his friends in the upper room, he was saying good-bye. He was saying he loved them. He was saying he wanted them to love one another. He was asking them to go out into the world and share God's love. Jesus knew the world was not perfect, that some would rather see him die than change. And yet he loved them, Jesus loves us.

Love meets us in the garden of Gethsemane, and tomorrow at the cross, and Sunday in the empty tomb. But tonight it meets us in a prayer, a prayer for us, for believers yet to believe, for the world when it needs new life. O God, help us listen for the word of love to rise again in our hearts. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.