

HOLY WEEK IN THE TIME OF CRISIS—

Maundy Thursday: Wedding Feast of the Kingdom



The great theme of Jesus' teaching is the Kingdom of God, and through this week's talks I have suggested that Crucifixion and Resurrection are events that define this Kingdom. They fall like a great axe-blow, cleaving the history of the universe into two - before and after. After the Cross, God's intentions are defined; God has chosen a side in history, and chosen a role. In choosing to hang accursed and outcast, Jesus defines God's side as the side of the poor - people who are excluded or suffer discrimination or have no status - people who know they need help. In life and in death, Jesus shows that God's role is to raise these people up, and to cast down the haughty and rich. This is the Kingdom of God.

We recall now the night on which the fuse was lit, that led to the cosmos-defining Big Bang of Cross and Resurrection. In this night, all of the meanings and intentions that Jesus laid out and explored over His years of active ministry are drawn together and laid before our eyes in stark simplicity.

The apostles who were present recorded their memories later, and offered us a series of snapshots - as if photographed in successive lightning flashes, between which falls deep darkness. The washing of feet. The heart-piercing realisation that Jesus knew he was to be betrayed, and by whom. The bread and wine. The garden and its double-betrayal: first, the small betrayal of sleep; then the larger betrayal, of the kiss. Jesus sweating blood, as he sets aside the option of an easy victory, choosing instead the outcast's death, the slave's death, the curse of being hanged on a tree. This choice that defines Jesus' life, and defines the Kingdom of which He is King, defines it as being for outcasts, for those enslaved and accursed by human society. It is not for generals who head legions of angels.

A series of snapshots – but this night, they merge into a single event. As geological pressure presses and squeezes and heats... so wood becomes coal, and coal becomes diamond... So the white-hot pressure of this night's events - a furnace of choice, self-definition and self-gift - squeeze themes and actions which might seem separate so that they merge and blend.

So the events of Maundy Thursday are not separate. Footwashing has to do with Eucharist, and both have to do with betrayal. All is held together in a field of self-giving love. Their meanings blur together, they refer to one another and cast light on each other. So, whenever we join together in Holy Communion, we summon up all of the events of Maundy Thursday. We enter into Jesus'

experience of betrayal and humiliation. We declare our faith that Jesus' death saved our lives.

And we choose. Every time we join together in the Eucharist, we choose again for ourselves. We choose, that we want to belong to God's church, and want to live - as individuals and as a people - according to the just and gentle law of the Kingdom of God. As we come to the altar, we choose again the downward path as our pilgrim way to salvation. We choose a life spent on our knees, wrapped in a towel, bathing smelly feet.

