

This Maundy Thursday we will be renewing our commitment to follow Jesus, as we think of how his disciples, to a man betrayed or denied or left him and fled. We gather as disciples as flawed as any have been to reflect on our failings and to seek God's grace to follow better.

Usually at this service we would share communion together. Obviously, this year we cannot do this. However in preparation for our worship get yourself some bread and some wine – or another drink. We can still use it as a memorial act of what Jesus did at the last supper. And after all, at that supper, Jesus wasn't holding a communion service: he was simply making sure he would be remembered every day in the simple necessities of life. So pause the audio and get your bread and drink, then come back and switch it on again.

We begin our time of worship with prayer, let us pray

Prayer

Lord God, this is a solemn night for your family, and we come to you in solidarity with Christians all around the world who want to remember the events of that fatal Thursday of holy week in Jerusalem so long ago. As we watch again the drama that is played out around the table and in the garden, so we ask that you would show us where we belong in that story. And as we worship you in our ones and twos remind us that we are also one with all your children of all times and places.

We pray for Jesus' sake, Amen.

Reading: Mark 14:12-31

The emotionally charged events around the last supper are full of good intentions. No one wants to be the one who will betray Jesus – and maybe even Judas didn't see what he was about to do as betrayal. Maybe he thought he was intervening for Jesus' own good. Maybe he didn't really believe that they would seek his death, but thought that the authorities might bind him over to keep the peace – or the Roman equivalent.

Jesus gives the bread and the cup with references not to the wonder of the exodus, to unleavened bread eaten in haste before a miraculous escape, or to the blood of a lamb that would protect God's faithful from the angel of death, but to his own body and blood. He is saying that his death will be as saving as was the exodus of the people from Egypt, that what is coming is a world-changing event. But his friends are not ready to hear this. And so the emotion builds, builds in confusion, for what we don't understand gives us feelings of strangeness. How well we know that in these days.

They leave the room and Jesus warns them that they will all desert and flee. And they deny it. Peter the most vehemently. Sadly, too often it is those who are most outspoken in their devotion who are the first to fall.

We have all vowed to follow at one time or another. And we have all betrayed, denied and deserted. And yet, knowing this, we are invited around the table. For our Saviour knows our weaknesses and loves us just the same. It is because of our weaknesses that he will go through the traumas of the next 24 hours.

Jesus took bread and wine and said remember me when you eat and drink. So take your bread and wine and remember him now. Press pause while you do it or consume them while you continue in worship.

Reading: Mark 14:32-50

They slept while he agonised. They were not ready when the test came, and so they all deserted and fled. Where is Jesus in agony now, and we all unaware? With whom does he share the pain, and we sleep without doing what we can to help? Who are those who are oppressed, and forgotten, who are too poor, in goods or in spirit to ask for help, for whom Jesus is in agony and we add to their and his pain by seeming unaware, doing nothing to help, showing no sympathy, even adding to the burden?

They slept while he agonised and so were not ready to stand with him when the test came. And if we live our lives concerned only or mainly for ourselves and the people who are dear to us, then do we not also sleep? And if our focus as a church is only for our own folk and our survival as an institution, do we not sleep? And if we sleep, how will we know what is happening, and be ready to stand with Jesus when we should? We are living through a time which will change things. People talk about and long for things to go back to normal. But they will not. I don't mean that this pandemic will last forever, but as people we travel forward and we cannot go back. Nor should we. This time of trial should be showing us anew what is important, and what can be dropped as we seek to live as faithful disciples. As we bring our prayers and fears to God, so we should and shall be changed.

Let us pray:

Lord God, we read of the scenes in the upper room and in the Garden of Gethsemane and our sympathies are with your disciples, because we too are confused by the time we are called to live through, and sometimes we would rather sleep and dream of more certain days than wait and watch with you.

Keep us awake and alert to what you are doing, in the world, in this land, in our community and in our lives. Even when you are working through things we find sad or puzzling, help us to watch faithfully with you.

We pray for Jesus' sake, Amen

We are not going to read on tonight, to the sad, sad story of Peter's denial of his Lord. We know it too well: the loudest of the disciples, the most given to affirming his devotion was the one who fell furthest, further even than Judas. Judas did not deny that he knew Jesus. It was because he allowed people to know that he was a disciple that he was able to betray. Peter tried to hide his connection with Jesus altogether.

Peter, Judas, Andrew, James, John, Thomas and all the rest. They were disciples and we are disciples. And we are made in their mode.

At the beginning of Lent some of us took little bags to use as a reminder to be a faithful disciple, to fulfil our vows to be glad to be known as one of Jesus' people. The hope was that we would be able to dedicate the contents of these bags and the works of faithfulness that they represent now. If you have such a bag, either hold onto it until we can be together again, or send a cheque for the amount in it to Crossreach, whose details you can look up on the internet.

But we can still bring the bags and the devotion that has gone into their contents to God now, or we can bring our intention of devotion, even if we didn't ever get one of the bags.

We will do this by using the words that our brothers and sisters in the Methodist church use annually when they renew their covenant to follow Jesus: And so that we may all speak the words, I am going to pause after each line of the prayer so that you have the chance to say it aloud as well. So say after me:

*I am no longer my own but yours.
Put me to what you will,
rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing,
put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you,
or laid aside for you,
exalted for you,
or brought low for you;
let me be full,
let me be empty,
let me have all things,
let me have nothing:
I freely and wholeheartedly
yield all things to your pleasure and disposal.*

We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.