

Maundy Thursday 2025 Reflection

'This is my body, given for you.... This is my blood, poured out for you.'

Those famous words echo through the ages and touch our souls again this evening. Tonight we gather to hear those words again, and to obey his command: we do this in remembrance of him.

But what do we remember? As we gather this evening, let's remind ourselves of three great truths, expressed in three simple words:

The first is Passover. The original context for Jesus' words was the great festival of Passover. The biggest celebration of the Jewish year, it told the ageless story of God's dramatic rescue of his people. Through the meal, the symbols, the gathering as family groups, a whole people recalled how God had intervened in human history to save them.

Indeed, the word remember is actually re-member, and it means: to put something back together. We (literally) "re-member" something, and what was scattered becomes whole. What was many becomes one.

At the Passover meal, Jesus and his friends re-membered their identity as God's covenant people. They re-membered God being with them, in steadfast love, even as they were treated harshly and enslaved. They re-membered God leading their ancestors in faith out of slavery, and turning their bitter burden into sweet freedom. They re-membered the sacrifice of the lamb and the firstborn, God's saving acts to restore his people. And as they dipped the vegetables in salt water, to remind them of their tears, and as they ate the sweet fruit, to remind them of their joys, they were putting it all together.

They were all there, to remember God's great and saving acts. They were there, in a sense, to remember who they were – as every devout and not-so-devout Jew did every year.

Theirs was a story of liberation, sealed in the blood of a lamb. This blood meant that the angel passed over, and the household was saved. The bread without yeast symbolised the speed of God's deliverance, as those rescued had no time to let the bread rise as normal. God's saving act was one to be received eagerly, and quickly. ***May the Lord open our eyes again to be just as eager to receive, and as we do so to re-member our identity as God's covenant people. This is our Passover, our story of rescue.***

Which leads us onto our second 'P' – Passion. Because as Jesus gathers to celebrate with his friends, as they begin to tell the story, Jesus does something... inexplicable. While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "This is my body."

Now it was customary for the patriarch of the household to break bread at any family meal. And this was not the first time Jesus had taken bread, and blessed it, and broken it, and given it to people to eat. But those other times, he did it for thousands. Here, in this large upstairs room somewhere in Jerusalem, Jesus did it for his *friends*. The people he loved.

He did it for a group of people who, from the beginning of their time together, mostly didn't understand what he was doing and where they were going. And as the events of the next few hours tell us, *still* didn't understand what was about to happen. People, in other words, just like us. People whose hearts were for Jesus, but whose legs, hands, minds sometimes faltered.

He did it with some level of confidence that this was, in fact, the last supper he would share with them – v16: ‘For I tell you I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God.’

On this night, at this meal, the meaning of the bread was pre-determined. Matzoh, the bread eaten at the Passover Meal, is called the “bread of affliction” or adversity. In Isaiah 30 it says, *‘Though the Lord may give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself any more, but your eyes shall see your Teacher.’*

The matzoh reminds of the suffering of the slaves in Egypt. But on that night, Jesus tells his friends, He is the bread. He will suffer. He will be broken.

Then, scripture tells us, Jesus took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, “This is my blood of the new covenant...” Again, Jesus has taken this night of remembering, and done something new and electrifying. Inexplicable. The meaning of the wine at the Passover meal is consistent – the wine is shared as part of a blessing, which is spoken aloud as follows:

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine, and who gave us, Lord our God, with love, festivals for happiness, holidays and times for joy, this day of Passover, the time of our freedom.

At the Passover Meal, wine is drunk in blessing and celebration and abundance, and the sharing of it is meant to “show freedom and majesty.” But Jesus, after passing around the wine, says, “This is my blood.” Jesus tells his friends that his life will be poured out, in much the same way as the life of the Passover lamb – the lamb which saved the people.

As Jesus shares this meal, he now becomes a new Lamb whose blood will save his people. The wooden doorframe of Passover becomes a wooden cross, where Jesus’ suffering makes us whole. ***His Passion becomes our Passover, our story of rescue and restoration, of forgiveness and freedom. Tonight we remember that, and give thanks.*** That is what we are here to remember, to re-member. We are putting it back together. In re-remembering, what was scattered becomes whole. What was many becomes one.

This is his body, broken for us. This is his blood, poured out for us.

But there is one last P – **Passing On**. Because the body of Christ is not just this bread – the bible tells us that it is us, too. We are now called the body of Christ, we are now those who offer ourselves to the world. Perhaps few of us are called to suffer as he did, but we are, in Henri Nouwen’s wonderful phrase, wounded healers – broken people through whom God in his grace can help to make others whole.

As we re-member the story of Passover, as we re-member the story of Christ’s Passion, so, when we go from this place, Christ can also be re-membered – in us and through us – as his body in the world. ***Those who follow Him are called to live as his hands, his feet, his voice and his heart in these anxious and difficult times. We remember Christ that we might also re-member Christ – taking his saving love to a hungry and thirsty world.***

This is his body, broken for us. This is his blood, poured out for us. Tonight, and every time we share this feast, may we do this in remembrance of him. Amen.