

## A Time of worship and reflection for Maundy Thursday 2020

### **Opening words:**

They gathered in an upper room to share a meal.

*(light a candle if you wish).*

We take our place at the table too.

For the first apostles and for all those who have kept the light of the gospel burning down the centuries, we give you thanks.

For those who went before us and passed the light onto us we remember them now with gratitude.

Come Lord Jesus, be present with us as we share together now.

**Bible Readings:** John 13: 1- 20

Matthew 26: 17-30

### **Reflection**

I feel very sad that we cannot gather this year for our Maundy Thursday services in our churches. Maundy Thursday holds a very special place in my heart and the atmosphere in the worship always seems to speak for itself. For those who gather, we know exactly why we have come. We are remembering the events on the last night of Jesus' life and how this leads into our observing of Good Friday and remembering how and why Jesus died. The fact that we won't be able to gather this year to remember these events together feels strange and, for me, leaves a gap that is hard to fill. In some ways it is hard to articulate quite how I feel about this, but some words I read last weekend in my newspaper seemed to put the finger on what I was feeling. George Alagiah, is a familiar face from BBC news. Some of you will know that he has been living with a cancer diagnosis for around 6 years now and this makes him a higher risk for contracting COVID-19. Unfortunately, despite taking all the necessary precautions he was found to have the virus, albeit in a relatively mild form. In a newspaper article he wrote about his experience of being a cancer and a Covid-19 patient at the same time and he said this:

'there is one significant way in which dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic is worse than living with cancer. One of the great revelations of being diagnosed with cancer, and accepting the vulnerability that comes with it, is the way that it has enriched my relationships with friends and family. People who had never hugged me somehow felt they had licence to do so; friends, new and old, have sat through chemo sessions, holding my hand when that is what I wanted or simply watching over me as I drifted off to sleep. We're a pretty tactile family - my wife, our sons, my sisters - but oh, how we have revelled in being physically close to each other these last few years. And that is precisely what Covid-19 has robbed us of. Social distancing, self-isolation, shelter-in-place - these are euphemisms for robbing us of the very thing that makes us human.

Physical contact, to touch each other, to sit next to each other, to walk side-by-side, these are the myriad, wordless ways in which we show our affection for those we care for.'

It strikes me that on the night before Jesus died he did a lot of things that we are currently unable to do. He had a table prepared and sat at a meal with friends. This group (all from different households) sat together, ate together, talked together, they touched one another, they served one another food and drink. Jesus washed each of his disciples feet; skin to skin contact. They left the place where they had eaten together and walked together eventually to Gethsemane. No self-isolation and social distancing going on here! The things 'that make us human' (as Alagiah puts it) were important to Christ on the night before he died. Maybe more so than ever he needed to feel the affirmation and touch of friends; the physical nourishment of a meal; the close companionship of those who he knew (despite the fact that they had and would let him down) would be witnesses to his story and take it forward into the world.

And maybe that is why Maundy Thursday is so special because we can imagine ourselves into that scene and the events of that night more easily than we can any other part of the story of Holy Week. We may not understand fully the weight of all that Jesus was carrying but we have prepared meals and sat at table with our friends, maybe we have even argued with them over the trifle too? We've prayed with others, offered companionship to others, held hands with and hugged others, we've walked with them and talked with them. And we've known that feeling of being let down and disappointed as well. Maybe, at times, we have been the one to disappoint and let others down. So here in this upper room and in the walk to the garden we are in step with Christ and his first followers, seeking to place ourselves in the middle of the drama of Christ's passion.

If Covid-19 is teaching us anything about our shared humanity, it is about not taking for granted the simple things that enrich our lives on a daily basis. Food and shared meals; conversation and connection with others; our ability to worship freely and without restraint; our sharing of the best meal of all - bread and wine. As we reflect on the last night of Jesus' life may we never again take for granted any of these things - they were important to Christ and we know now, more than ever, that they are important to us too.

### **Intercessions**

Loving God, Christ knelt and washed his disciples' feet. As we follow his example, grant us servant hearts, that we might love without counting the cost, and serve not thinking of our own status, but putting others before ourselves. May our church be a servant community and may we live and proclaim the grace of the gospel.

Lord, hear our prayer

Christ broke bread, shared it among his disciples and said this is my body given for you. May we who share in Christ's generosity be generous to others. May we hunger and thirst for reconciliation, may we, like Christ, be peacemakers.

Lord, hear our prayer

Christ took the cup, and said drink from it all of you. May we seek unity in the church, holding firm to the essentials, but treating all other matters with a gentleness of touch. We pray for those who feel alienated from the church, that they may know the unconditional welcome of Jesus, the friend of sinners.

Lord, hear our prayer

Christ was betrayed by one of those closest to him. By the power of the Spirit, may we have courage to be faithful even to the end, and to bear witness to the crucified King. We pray for our nation, and for those in authority. For those who uphold our laws that they may pursue what is right and just.

Lord, hear our prayer

Christ knelt in the garden and wept for the sins of the world. Break our hearts that we may weep for this world torn apart and broken by war, conflict, Covid-19, greed and exploitation, remind us of our responsibility for the hungry, the destitute and the lost. And grant us eyes to see beyond the cross to a new creation where peace rules and every tear is wiped away.

Lord, hear our prayer

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

### **Closing words:**

After the meal Jesus and his disciples sang a hymn and they went out to the Mount of Olives. Jesus said to them, 'All of you will run away and leave me, for the scripture says, 'God will kill the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered'.

Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane. He was arrested and they all forsook him and fled.

(if lit, extinguish candle).