

## EVENING SERVICE

9 April 2009, Killean & Kilchenzie

*Maundy Thursday*

*Communion*

*leading & reading : the minister and three members of the congregation*

*hymns: Church Hymnary. Fourth Edition (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2005) / Enemy of Apathy (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2006) / Traditional*

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*(On the table: communion cup & plate, plus a paschal candle)*

### Welcome & Intimations

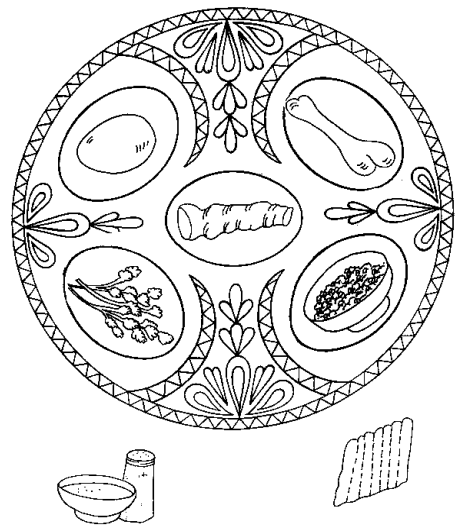
In this service we will read the story about the Last Supper. To understand it better I'd like to explain something about the backgrounds.

Jesus and his disciples follow their Jewish tradition. They have come to Jerusalem with many pilgrims to celebrate *Pesach*, the Passover Feast, also called Feast of Unleavened Bread. That is the festival to remember the exodus of the people of Israel from their slavery in Egypt. Most of it is still celebrated by Jews today as it was in Jesus' days.

On the Jewish calendar (like the Islamic calendar, by the way) the new day begins at sunset. So *Pesach* starts with a meal at home on the night of the 14<sup>th</sup> of *Nisan*. This is called the *Seder* meal. That is a family event, including all children, and also guests, even non-Jews. During the meal the youngest child asks the central question: 'Why is this night different from all other nights?' That starts off the telling of the story of the exodus, the *Haggada*, and that should be done in such a way that children can understand its meaning.

The food has special ingredients and five of these are put on a special *Pesach* plate. The food has a symbolic meaning:

- + *beitzah*: a boiled and roasted egg, also to remind people of the sacrifices in the Temple;
- + *z'roa*: a roasted shank bone, to remind people of the lamb that was sacrificed when the Temple was still there, like in Jesus' days;
- + *maror*: bitter herbs, usually horseradish, to remind people of the bitter slavery;
- + *carpas*: a mix of fresh herbs and vegetables, to symbolise the liberation of the slaves.
- + *charoset*: a mix of almonds, apples, raisins, cinnamon and wine (a treat for the children), to remind people of the mortar the slaves made;



During the meal there will also be *matzah*, or unleavened bread, to remind people of the haste while leaving Egypt. Some food is dipped in salt water, to remind people of the tears the slaves have cried. And of course there is a lot of lovely other food.

Several cups of wine will be drunk. The third came with a special blessing and the fourth was set aside for Elijah. There is a very old belief that in the night of *Pesach* the Messiah will come, but Elijah will arrive first as his herald. So there is always a chair reserved for Elijah.

The *Seder* meal is a very intense way to celebrate that God sets his people free. It also looks forward to the day of the Messiah, when God's kingdom will come on earth.

## PREPARATION

**Opening Hymn** : 'The Lord's my shepherd' (CH 14)

**Prayer**

## THE WORD

**Reading** : Exodus 12:1-14 (*Good News Bible*)

The reading from Exodus 12 has been a tradition in the church since ancient times. It is the story that is read on the evening of the Jewish *Pesach*. This year that almost coincides with our Easter date. Yesterday it was 14 *Nisan* according to the Hebrew calendar, and yesterday evening at the *Seder* meal, or Passover meal, in Jewish houses around the world – also in Kintyre – this story has been told again, especially for the children. Also Jesus and his disciples have certainly told this story at their last supper together, since that was a *Seder* meal.

**Hymn** : 'When Israel was in Egypt's land' (Trad.)

**Reading** : Mark 14:12-26 (*Good News Bible*)

We continue our readings with the story Mark has written about that last supper, that *Seder* meal Jesus and his friends shared.

### Taking a closer look

Sieger Köder is a famous religious artist in Germany today. He has made large paintings, altar-pieces, book illustrations and small cards. Sieger says his art is a 'mirror and symbol of what we experience in real life'. As a new way to encounter the story of Maundy Thursday, we brought the painting titled 'The Last Supper' to this service. You are invited to have a closer look at it (also after the service) and listen to a short reflective text.<sup>1</sup>

*(2-3 minutes of silence)*

### On second hearing

We will listen again to a few words from today's readings, and reflect on these. On second hearing we may perceive the Bible words differently.

*Leader:*

*This month – Nisan, is to be the first month of the year for you.*

*Reader A:*

Now is the time – but when will that be?

*To everything*

*There is a season*

*And a time for every purpose under heaven.*

*A time to be born, a time to die*

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<sup>1</sup> Monica Brown & Hilary Musgrave, *In Celebration of Wholeness* (Slough: St Paul Multimedia Productions, 1999) p4. (For reasons of copyright I cannot print it here.)

*A time to plant, a time to reap  
A time to kill, a time to heal  
A time to laugh, a time to weep...<sup>2</sup>*

Indeed, there is a time for everything. But we will miss that right moment if we don't pay attention to it. The only time that really counts, is the right time.

That is why Pesach, the festival of Israel's liberation from Egypt, from the house of slavery and the land of death, has an explicit timing: the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, as soon as the sun sets. It's not just set in stone, but moreover it is engraved in the hearts and souls of all the people of Israel. Lest they would ever forget the very foundation of their existence: God's liberation. This is the day!

Do we know the time when it's right?  
*(short silence)*

*Leader:*

*When I see the blood, I will pass over you and will not harm you when I punish the Egyptians. You must celebrate this day as a day of remembrance...*

*Reader B:*

In the Bible blood first of all means 'life'. For all living creatures blood is the source of life. As Noah was taught after the flood, whoever sheds blood, will be held accountable for that.<sup>3</sup>

When blood is shed, even if it is the oppressor's blood – as in the case of the Egyptians in the Bible story – our alarms should be ringing aloud. It's a remembrance day! The lamb at Pesach was killed for a simple, valid reason: to provide food. But because there is no longer a temple in Jerusalem, it has not been a sacrifice for ages. Still its blood is alarmingly red.

Do we count to ten, do we think twice for all the lives taken away from us? Animals, workers in sweatshops, children in Asia's slums, casualties in traffic, victims of our wars? Do we really know of the sacredness of all life?  
*(short silence)*

*Leader:*

*Where do you want us to go and get the Passover meal ready for you?*

*Reader A:*

Not only is there a right time, there is also a right place to remember God's liberation from the dark forces of death and destruction. The place for Passover is firmly rooted in daily life: it is the table at home, where the family shares its meals. The place where Jesus leads his friends to seems to be outside the home, although it still is a room. We

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<sup>2</sup> The Byrds, 'Turn, turn, turn' (1965).

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 9:3-6.

might think that remembering God's great deeds is something to do in a church.

The essential thing is, that remembering God's liberation does not require some sacred place. Any place can be the right one. The people and their act of remembrance hallow that place. So our own sacred places can have very different locations. It is up to us, led by the Spirit, to become Christ's body and through that create sacred times and places.

Where do we have our sacred places? And do these places enable us to carry that sacredness with us, bringing it to other places?

*(short silence)*

*Leader:*

*While they were at the table eating, Jesus said, "I tell you that one of you will betray me – one who is eating with me."*

*Reader B:*

As so often in Bible stories, there is this awful crack in the tale. Betrayal – even in the very core of Jesus' closest friends. Even if the word 'betrayal' is not a correct translation, and we should actually read 'handing over', it still is an act contrary to what should happen.

We may have that typically automatic reaction that immediately puts the blame on someone else. Of course, it's Judas. Not us. But the eleven disciples are not so sure about that. They all ask Jesus, 'It's not me, is it?'

Can we face our own betrayal of our neighbours, family, friends? And can we be forgiven?

*(short silence)*

*Leader:*

*This is my body... This is my blood... I will never again drink this wine until the day I drink the new wine in the Kingdom of God.*

*Reader A:*

Life itself is sacred. I do not believe God demands sacrifices. But still Jesus chose to be absolutely true to his friends and his vocation, regardless where that would lead to. In the mystery his flesh and blood are almost tangibly among us, when we share bread and wine.

*Reader B:*

Surely that is sacrifice. Not a method to purchase heavenly favours, but a fully free giving of one's life and love for the wholeness of all. Do not worry about fate or death or disaster, but instead trust and be as unrestrained as a lamb. Isn't that the sacrifice of your selfishness and fear? That surely is the clearest sign of God's kingdom among us, I would say. Jesus' death and resurrection have freed us from the need for

sacrifice. Instead he has given us back our responsibility to follow him, regardless where it leads to.

*(short silence)*

## **THE TABLE**

**Hymn** : 'Take, oh, take me as I am' (CH 795)

### **Narration**

*(We form a circle around the table, with those who find it difficult to stand sitting on the front pew.)*

One day the prophet came to town  
to look for the one to be king of Israel.  
That day the people had a meal  
together with Samuel;  
and sharing food and wine  
they felt the kingdom coming closer.

Another day the people came to Jesus  
to see the signs and hear the Word –  
and they were really hungry,  
but the kingdom seemed far away.  
And Jesus said to Philip,  
'Give them bread.'  
But Philip could not do anything more  
than finding Andrew, and a boy,  
and five loaves and two fish.  
But look! – there was plenty for all  
once they dared to share.  
And the people knew  
that the kingdom was near  
and that Jesus was the prophet.

The next day Jesus taught them  
a lesson about the bread.  
'What you have eaten  
is the bread from heaven;  
what comes from heaven  
brings life to the earth.  
I am the bread of life,  
and if you live in me,  
you will share the life  
that lasts forever.'

So if we break our bread to share it,  
and drink from the same cup,  
we proclaim the Gospel  
that all life comes from God,  
that all living creatures  
are kept in the palm of God's hand,  
and that this life is stronger than death,  
stronger than all that is wrong.

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

Blessed are you, O God,  
Creator, Sustainer, Healer.  
Blessed are you, O God,  
for you meet us  
in the daily bread we share,  
in the joys of our lifetime,  
in the eyes of a stranger,  
in the touch of one who cares.  
You give us everlasting life,  
your Word enters our flesh,  
your love sustains our soul,  
your wisdom builds our mind.  
Blessed are you, O God.

### **The blessing of the bread and wine**

We bless the Spirit of fellowship,  
we bless God's sons and daughters,  
we bless the Giver of bread and wine.  
May they be heaven's food and drink for us.  
Amen.

### **The breaking and sharing of the bread and wine**

*[breaking the bread:]*  
Bread from heaven,  
bread to feed body and soul.

*[taking the cup:]*  
Wine from the Kingdom,  
wine to rejoice and be glad.

*[lifting bread and cup:]*  
The gifts of God, for the people of God!  
*(sharing of bread & wine)*

### **A sign of peace**

We have shared bread and wine;

now let us share the peace of Christ.  
*(sharing of the peace)*

**Closing Hymn** : 'Sing my soul' (EofA, p61)

**Blessing**