Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Focus: Maundy Thursday

Scripture: John 13:1–17, 31–35 NRSV

Gathering

Welcome

Maundy Thursday is the night on which the Lord’s Supper first was celebrated. The central theme of that first Lord’s Supper was one of humble service. Jesus washed the feet of the disciples and commanded that they do the same for each other. Jesus taught that he came not to be served, but to serve; to share the hospitality of God and the intimacy of breaking bread together.

Prayer for Peace

Ring a bell or chime three times slowly.
Light the peace candle.

Loving and humble God,

Today we make ourselves vulnerable to your Spirit. You showed the disciples vulnerability as you stooped to wash their feet. How might we have the same courage to do the same with our friends and neighbors as we seek to create peace? You create spaces for each person at your table and feed us in a new way, allowing us to take peace into our hearts. Grace us with that peace so that we may share it. May the voices of servant-leaders focused on peace be uplifted over the voices of hatred and division so that all may find their place at the table. Amen.

—Caleb and Tiffany Brian

Spiritual Practice

Body Prayer

Say aloud: Today our spiritual practice will be a body prayer.
Show the group members three postures they will experience for this spiritual exercise:
• First posture—head bowed with hands folded
• Second posture—sitting or standing with arms stretched outward
• Third posture—both hands clasped over the heart.
Say: “A chime will signal when to move into the next posture. You will not offer any words of prayer. Instead focus on sensing what type of prayer wants to emerge from you as you hold each posture.”

Lead the group in three deep, cleansing breaths as preparation. Ring a chime.
First posture: Bow your head and fold your hands (one minute). Ring a chime.
Second posture: Sit or stand with your arms stretched outward (one minute). Ring a chime.
Third posture: Clasp your hands over your heart (one minute). Ring a chime.
Close with a spoken “Amen.”
Invite participants to share what they experienced as they engaged in the body prayer.

Sharing Around the Table
John 13:1-17, 31-35 NRSV

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” Jesus answered, “You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” Peter said to him, “You will never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.” Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” Jesus said to him, “One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.” For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

...When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”
When Jesus washes the disciples’ feet it typifies how he lived in service to others. It is the gospel in action.

The passage tells us Jesus “took off his outer robe” before washing the feet of the disciples. In Greek, another meaning can be to “lay down one’s life.”

Once Jesus washed their feet, he wiped them with a towel. The word the author used for *wiped* also can mean to *anoint*. Anointing is a sacred act of using oil as a symbol of God’s presence.

The original hearers of this passage may have pictured Jesus getting up and taking off his robe, washing the disciples’ feet, and then drying them with a towel. But, they also might have understood that Jesus laid down his life for the disciples, washed and anointed their feet—consecrating them and bringing them into God’s presence. The dual meaning deepens this beautiful passage about servant ministry. This small part of the longer passage, expresses the ministry and message of Jesus.

This passage ends with Jesus challenging his disciples (then and now) to live this message. He gives a new commandment that requires disciples to “love one another. Just as I have loved you.” This is how everyone will know these are disciples of Jesus Christ—by their acts of servant ministry.

**Questions**

1. How can you “wash the feet of another” in today’s world?
2. Describe a time when you saw someone offer humble service.
3. What do your actions tell others about you?

**Sending**

**Generosity Statement**

Faithful disciples respond to an increasing awareness of the abundant generosity of God by sharing according to the desires of their hearts; not by commandment or constraint.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:9

The offering basket is available if you would like to support ongoing, small-group ministries as part of your generous response. This offering prayer is adapted from A Disciple’s Generous Response:

God of rejoicing, We share with joy-filled hearts in response to the presence of your Son. May the offerings we share bring joy, hope, love, and peace into the lives of others that they might experience your mercy and grace. Amen

**Invitation to Next Meeting**

**Closing Hymn**

*CCS 597, “Make Me a Servant”*

**Closing Prayer**
Optional Additions Depending on Group

- Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
- Thoughts for Children
Prayer for Peace

*Ring a bell or chime three times slowly.*
*Light the peace candle.*

Loving and humble God,

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Questions

4. How can you “wash the feet of another” in today’s world?
5. Describe a time when you saw someone offer humble service.
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Communion Statement

Choose one scripture to read from this selection: 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; Matthew 26:17–30; Mark 14:12–26; Luke 22:7–39.

Invitation to Communion

All are welcome at Christ’s table. The Lord’s Supper, or Communion, is a sacrament in which we remember the life, death, resurrection, and continuing presence of Jesus Christ. In Community of Christ, we also experience Communion as an opportunity to renew our baptismal covenant and to be formed as disciples who live Christ’s mission. Others may have different or added understandings within their faith traditions. We invite all who participate in the Lord’s Supper to do so in the love and peace of Jesus Christ.

On this Maundy Thursday let us meet Jesus at the table, sharing Communion as an expression of blessing, healing, peace, and servant ministry. In preparation let’s sing Community of Christ Sings 528, “Eat This Bread,” three times through.
Thoughts for Children

Materials: baby wipes or hand sanitizer

Share the story of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples:

Jesus loved his friends very much. For Jesus, love is shown by doing kind things for others, or serving others. He wanted to show his friends how important this was. So he took a bowl of water and a towel, and he knelt and washed their feet.

Washing feet was a task that servants did as family and guests came into the house. People wore sandals or went barefoot, and their feet could get very dirty. Foot washing helped keep the people and the inside of the house clean.

Jesus washed the feet of his friends—like a servant would—to show them how important it is to serve others.

When we go out, our hands get very dirty. What are some ways you wash your hands each day? Offer affirming responses to the children’s answers.

One way I wash my hands when I am in a car or a busy place is with a moist wipe.

Open a wipe and wash your hands with it. Ask if you may wash the hands of the children. If the child agrees, quietly wash each child’s hands.

Now we can do what Jesus did and wash the hands of our friends and family. One by one have each child wash the hands of someone in the group until everyone’s hands have been washed.

When you are done, offer a short prayer of thanksgiving for these young people who follow Jesus.