

We are here tonight to celebrate Maundy Thursday, a service to remember the “Last Supper” Jesus ate with His Disciples before his arrest, trial and crucifixion. The word “Maundy” means command or mandate. Jesus gave two commands to His Disciples at the Last Supper. After washing His Disciple's feet Jesus said, “I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.” (John 13:15 NLT) Foot washing was a servant's job. Jesus tells us to serve others. We can do that every day. The second command Jesus gave that day was to celebrate the Lord's Supper often in remembrance of Him. We will do that in a few minutes.

Jesus' Last Supper was the Passover, the celebration of the liberation of the Children of Israel from slavery in Egypt. The Jewish Passover celebration begins tomorrow. The name Passover comes from the 10th plague that God sent on Egypt to liberate the Israelites. The people were told to take the blood of the lamb they would eat during the Passover meal and put it around the doors of their houses so that the angel of death would see it and Pass Over without taking the life of their first born sons. The lamb died to save the first born son.

The Passover meal, also called the Seder, has a variety of special foods, ritual hand washing, and four cups of wine that are all parts of the celebration. This was a meal to be celebrated with family and friends. So we celebrate the Lord's Supper together in the family of faith. We are going to focus our attention on the parts of the Passover that relate directly to the Lord's Supper.

The Israelites were told to prepare quickly for the Passover and to be ready to leave Egypt. So they did not have time to let bread rise. They ate bread made without yeast that looks more like a large cracker than bread called Matzah. The Jewish people would have one loaf of bread. Two loafs for the Sabbath as a reminder of the double portions of manna that fell on Friday as they made their way across the wilderness. In honor of Passover, a third Matzah was added. The three pieces of Matzah were placed inside a special covering call the Unity. The middle piece is removed, broken in half and hidden in a small napkin called the afikomon. The leader asks the children to close their eyes as he hides the afikomon. Christians realize that the Unity represents the Trinity, the unique Unity of the three persons in one, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

After the afikomon is hidden, the children ask four questions.

1. Why is this night different from all other nights? Why do we only eat unleavened bread?
The answer. Our ancestors had no time to bake bread with yeast, so they baked it without yeast or leaven.
2. Other nights we eat all kinds of herbs, why do we only eat bitter herbs? They remind us of the bitterness the Israelites experienced in Egypt.

3. Other nights we don't dip our herbs once, why do we dip herbs twice tonight? The green vegetable in salt water and the bitter herbs in charoset (horse radish) remind us of the sorrows of slavery.
4. Other nights we eat sitting down. Why do we recline tonight? In the ancient world, slaves ate in a hurry standing up. The wealthy reclined on couches. To show their freedom, the Israelites reclined while eating.

The Matzah is pierced and striped in the baking process. The unleavened, pierced and striped Matzah is a symbol of Jesus who never sinned, but was pierced for our sins. The prophet Isaiah wrote, "But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed." (Isaiah 53:5 NLT) The traditional Jewish Matzah is a reminder for Christians that Jesus died in our place.

After the meal it over, the afikomon is found by a child and given to the leader. This is the bread that Jesus broke and gave to His Disciples when He said, "This is my body." Think about this. The middle piece of Matzah in the Unity represents the crucified son of God who was broken and died to pay for our sins. The finding of the afikomon represents His resurrection. This is the bread we share in the Lord's Supper.

The traditional Jewish Passover has four cups of wine that recalls the promises God gave to the people of Israel in Exodus 6:6-7. "I am the Lord. I will free you from your oppression and (I) will rescue you from your slavery in Egypt. I will redeem you with a powerful arm and great acts of judgment. I will claim you as my own people." (NLT) Jesus took the third cup, the cup of redemption and said, "Each of you drink from it, for this is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many." (Matthew 26 27-28 NLT) To redeem is to buy back. Jesus shed His blood on the cross to buy us back from sin and death, to forgive our sins and restore us to God's family.

Tonight we can ask our own four questions.

1. Why is Jesus called the Lamb of God? Like the Passover Lambs, Jesus sacrificed His life to save us, to pay the price for our sins.
2. Why don't we just celebrate the Lord's Supper once a year? Jesus tells us to eat and drink often in remembrance of Him.
3. What is different about the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper? Jesus said that they are His body and blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins.
4. Why do we say that we celebrate the Lord's Supper? The Lord's Supper is the celebration of Jesus' victory over sin and death to give us forgiveness and life.

Jesus' "Last Supper" was the First Lord's Supper. The Passover would conclude with the fourth cup, the cup of Hope. Our hope tonight is that those who do not know of follow Jesus will soon come to believe in Him. Our second hope is that when Jesus returns we will celebrate with Him and all of His people in God the Father's Kingdom.

We finish our reflection on the Last Supper with this prayer.

**We thank and praise You, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that You have accepted us as Your children because Jesus, the Lamb of God, has taken away the sins of the world!
Amen.**