

A Reflection for Maundy Thursday

Introduction

There are some small dating discrepancies between the gospels. In John, the crucifixion happens on the Jewish day of Preparation (John 19:42), that is, before Passover starts. Jesus dies as the lambs are being slaughtered in the Temple (2 Chronicles 30:15). For Matthew, the Last Supper is a Passover *Seder* on the first day of Passover. The meal they share is a commemoration of the Exodus.

Ordinarily (ever since Noah), drunkenness is shameful for Jews. On Passover, it is different; this is the one day in the year when Jews are encouraged, no, commanded to get tipsy. The Seder contains the observance of many biblical and rabbinical *mitzvot* (commandments, religious duties), including: eating matzah (unleavened bread), eating maror (bitter herbs), drinking four cups of wine (which must each be substantial), relating the story of the Exodus to the children, reclining (not sitting on a chair) as a symbol of freedom, and so on.

Unusually, this reflection follows Matthew's account. The reader is invited to consider what Matthew omits.

Prayer for the beginning of a Passover Sederⁱ

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Blessed are You, God, our God, King of the universe, who has chosen us from among all people, and raised us above all tongues, and made us holy through His commandments. And You, God, our God, have given us in love festivals for happiness, feasts and festive seasons for rejoicing the day of this Feast of Matzot and this Festival of holy convocation, the Season of our Freedom, a holy convocation, commemorating the departure from Egypt. For You have chosen us and sanctified us from all the nations, and You have given us as a heritage Your holy Festivals, in happiness and joy.

Blessed are You, God, who sanctifies Israel and the festive seasons.



Jesus Eats the Passover Meal with His Disciples

¹⁷On the first day of the Festival of Thin Bread, Jesus' disciples came to him and asked, "Where do you want us to prepare the Passover meal?"

¹⁸Jesus told them to go to a certain man in the city and tell him, "Our teacher says, 'My time has come! I want to eat the Passover meal with my disciples in your home.'" ¹⁹They did as Jesus told them and prepared the meal.

²⁰⁻²¹When Jesus was eating with his twelve disciples that evening, he said, "One of you will surely hand me over to my enemies."

²²The disciples were very sad, and each one said to Jesus, "Lord, you can't mean me!"

²³He answered, "One of you men who has eaten with me from this dish will betray me. ²⁴The Son of Man will die, as the Scriptures say. But it's going to be terrible for the one who betrays me! That man would be better off if he had never been born."

²⁵Judas said, "Teacher, you surely don't mean me!"

"That's what you say!" Jesus replied. But later, Judas did betray him.

The fourth cup

abridged from a Passover Haggadah ⁱⁱ

The blessing for the wine:

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Praise:

What can I repay the Lord for all His kindness to me?

I will raise the cup of salvation and call upon the Name of the Lord.

I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all His people.

Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His pious ones.

I thank you, Lord, for I am Your servant.

I am Your servant the son of Your handmaid, You have loosened my bonds.

To You I will bring an offering of thanksgiving, and I will call upon the Name of the Lord.

I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all His people, in the courtyards of the House of the Lord, in the midst of Jerusalem.

Halleluyah, Praise God.



The wine is drunk in a reclining position. Concluding Blessing for the Wine:

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe
for the vine and the fruit of the vine, for the produce of the field,
and for the precious, good and spacious land which You have favoured to give as an
heritage to our fathers, to eat of its fruit and be satiated by its goodness.
Have mercy, Lord our God, on Israel Your people, on Jerusalem Your city,
on Zion the abode of Your glory, on Your altar and on Your Temple...
make us rejoice in it, and we will bless You in holiness and purity
and remember us for good on this day of the Festival of Matzot.
For You, Lord, are good and do good to all,
and we thank You for the land and for the fruit of the vine.
Blessed are You, Lord, for the land and for the fruit of the vine.

Matthew 26: 17-30

The Lord's Supper

²⁶During the meal Jesus took some bread in his hands. He blessed the bread and broke it. Then he gave it to his disciples and said, "Take this and eat it. This is my body."

²⁷Jesus picked up a cup of wine and gave thanks to God. He then gave it to his disciples and said, "Take this and drink it. ²⁸This is my blood, and with it God makes his agreement with you. It will be poured out, so that many people will have their sins forgiven. ²⁹From now on I am not going to drink any wine, until I drink new wine with you in my Father's kingdom." ³⁰Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives.



Fractured food ⁱⁱⁱ

Steven Shakespeare

Lord, you are always breaking apart our communities,
our identities, our images of you:
open hand and heart to receive this fractured food,
this feast where untouchables meet, human and divine;
through Jesus Christ, the passion of God.

Amen.

Matthew 26: 31-46

Peter's Promise

³¹ Jesus said to his disciples, "During this very night, all of you will reject me, as the Scriptures say,

'I will strike down the shepherd,
and the sheep will be scattered.'

³² But after I am raised to life, I will go to Galilee ahead of you."

³³ Peter spoke up, "Even if all the others reject you, I never will!"

³⁴ Jesus replied, "I promise you that before a rooster crows tonight, you will say three times that you don't know me." ³⁵ But Peter said, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never say I don't know you."

All the others said the same thing.

Jesus Prays

³⁶ Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane. When they got there, he told them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."

³⁷ Jesus took along Peter and the two brothers, James and John.^[a] He was very sad and troubled, ³⁸ and he said to them, "I am so sad that I feel as if I am dying. Stay here and keep awake with me."

³⁹ Jesus walked on a little way. Then he knelt with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, don't make me suffer by having me drink from this cup.^[a] But do what you want, and not what I want."

⁴⁰ He came back and found his disciples sleeping. So he said to Peter, "Can't any of you stay awake with me for just one hour? ⁴¹ Stay awake and pray that you won't be tested. You want to do what is right, but you are weak."

⁴² Again Jesus went to pray and said, "My Father, if there is no other way, and I must suffer, I will still do what you want."

⁴³ Jesus came back and found them sleeping again. They simply could not keep their eyes open. ⁴⁴ He left them and prayed the same prayer once more.

⁴⁵ Finally, Jesus returned to his disciples and said, "Are you still sleeping and resting?^[a] The time has come for the Son of Man to be handed over to sinners. ⁴⁶ Get up! Let's go. The one who will betray me is already here."



Lord, you call us to watch with you on this line between dream and waking,
sense and madness, garden and spoil heap:
touch our weary eyes with tears
to see that you are in the wrestling place
between God and fallen flesh;
through Jesus Christ, the passion of God.

Amen.

Matthew 26: 47-56

Jesus Is Arrested

⁴⁷ Jesus was still speaking, when Judas the betrayer came up. He was one of the twelve disciples, and a large mob armed with swords and clubs was with him. They had been sent by the chief priests and the nation's leaders. ⁴⁸ Judas had told them ahead of time, "Arrest the man I greet with a kiss."^[a]

⁴⁹ Judas walked right up to Jesus and said, "Hello, teacher." Then Judas kissed him.

⁵⁰ Jesus replied, "My friend, why are you here?"^[a]

The men grabbed Jesus and arrested him. ⁵¹ One of Jesus' followers pulled out a sword. He struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear.

⁵² But Jesus told him, "Put your sword away. Anyone who lives by fighting will die by fighting. ⁵³ Don't you know that I could ask my Father, and right away he would send me more than twelve armies of angels? ⁵⁴ But then, how could the words of the Scriptures come true, which say that this must happen?"

⁵⁵ Jesus said to the mob, "Why do you come with swords and clubs to arrest me like a criminal? Day after day I sat and taught in the temple, and you didn't arrest me. ⁵⁶ But all this happened, so that what the prophets wrote would come true."

All of Jesus' disciples left him and ran away.

The agony of God^v

Nancy Telfer

I listen to the agony of God –
I who am fed, who never went hungry for a day.
I see the dead – the children starved for lack of bread –
I see and try to pray.

I listen to the agony of God –
I who am warm, who never yet lacked a sheltering home.
In dull alarm, the dispossessed of hut and farm
aimless and transient roam.

I listen to the agony of God –
I who am strong with health and love and laughter in my soul.
I see a throng of stunted children reared in wrong
and wish to make the whole.

I listen to the agony of God –
but know full well that not until I share their bitter cry –
earth's pain and hell – can God within my spirit dwell
to bring the Kingdom nigh.

I was hungry, not just for food,
but for peace that comes from a pure heart.
I was thirsty not for water,
but for peace that satiates the passionate thirst for war.
I was naked not for clothes,
but for that beautiful dignity of men and women for their bodies.

I was homeless, not for a shelter made of bricks,
but for a heart that understands,
that covers,
that loves.

I was hungry; I was thirsty; I was naked; I was homeless.
Yet I found peace, peace and dignity
and a heart that loves.

Prayer^{vi}

Simon Peters, Project Manager for Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today

Ever-loving God,
We don't always understand what's going on, but you do.
We don't always respond to things positively, but you do.
We don't always get things right, in our thoughts, words or deeds, but you do.
Help us then, dear Lord, never to lose sight of you,
For in our weakness, you give us strength,
in our sadness, you give us joy,
in our uncertainty, you give us hope.
Bless us, then, and prepare us, always, for your service.
In the name of Jesus,

Amen.

ⁱ https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/661624/jewish/English-Haggadah-Text.htm

ⁱⁱ https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/661624/jewish/English-Haggadah-Text.htm

ⁱⁱⁱ Prayers for an Inclusive Church, Steven Shakespeare, Canterbury Press 2008 p19.

^{iv} Prayers for an Inclusive Church, Steven Shakespeare, Canterbury Press 2008 p19.

^v Liturgy of Life, Donald Hilton, NCEC 1991, p181.

^{vi} <https://urc.org.uk/latest-news/3410-maundy-thursday-god-is-with-us.html>