

*“Why is this night different from all other nights?”*

In Jewish homes, as has been done for centuries, a child asks this question to begin the celebration of the Feast of the Passover, as Jews throughout the world retell the story of the Exodus and celebrate the escape of their ancestors from slavery in Egypt. It is a time when the People of God keep the divine commandment to “tell the story to their children, and their children’s children, and their children’s children’s children, so that everyone will know” how God acted in human history to bring freedom to their oppressed forebears.

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On this night, God’s Chosen People recall the violence and terror of that night. They remember the death that swept through every home of their Egyptian oppressors, but how the angel of death passed over the slave quarters and spared the lives of all the Hebrew first-borns. They recall the story of the People of God as they ran for their lives under the fire and cloud of God’s own protection, with Egyptian soldiers in hot pursuit. They remember the waters that miraculously parted to ensure the Hebrew

people's safe passage out of their slavery in Egypt, and then how those same waters reconnected to drown their pursuers. And just as we also claim this biblical story to be our history and our truth, we, too, must ask that child's question.

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On this Maundy Thursday night we hear again Jesus' commandment to love one another, and we consider the models that he left us. We remember how he took old, familiar things and gave them new meanings. Foot-washing had simply been a kindness to barefooted travelers after walking for hours on hot sand and dusty roads. But for Jesus and his disciples, on that particular Passover night, it became a symbol of love expressed in kindness and in service to others. And for generations, people had seen bread and wine raised in a Sabbath blessing to a great and faithful God. But on that particular night, that same bread and wine became the Body and Blood of a Lord whose obedient death brings everlasting life. This ritual offering became a new act of sacrifice and redemption, as the atoning Body and Blood of Christ gives eternal life. On this special night and in this special liturgy – different from all others - we

gather to give thanks for the blessing of a God who forgives us, restores us, and calls us to join in the creative act of “making all things new.”

And so it is that on this night, which is so different from all other nights, we are called to witness to that difference. More than simply gathering for services of remembrance, we are called to carry the touching, healing, and transforming message of the Gospel out into the world and among people that God loved enough to send a Son to die for. Tonight Jesus is calling us to continue his great legacy, to keep it alive by finding find new ways to wash feet and nourish bodies and give comfort to people who are in pain. Renewed by the presence of his Body and Blood within us, we take seriously the divine call to bring the Gospel’s Good News, to help the hungry, the homeless, the harried, and the hurting.

A few years back, as violence raged between Palestinians and Israelis during Passover, a news commentator asked: “What makes this night different from all other nights?”; and then answered his own question: “What makes this night different? Absolutely nothing.” But our witness, as those who bear the name of Christ, is that we can and do make it different. We can and do make a difference in the world by laboring with God to stop the violence, the abuse, the oppression, the exploitation. We

can and do witness to the power of our Great Redeemer by redeeming pain whenever we see it, striving for peace whenever we encounter the need for it, and working fervently for reconciliation with justice.

The witness of this particular night, this Maundy Thursday celebration in churches across the globe, is that no matter what society's response may be, nothing the world can do can stop the love and mercy and grace and justice and forgiveness of Jesus Christ, working in and through you and me, the people of God. And that makes all the difference. Amen.