

Maundy Thursday 2024

Do this in remembrance of me, He said.

Maundy Thursday, amongst other things, is the night when we remember the first Eucharist, the Last Supper. Maundy, you'll remember, derives from the Latin *mandatum*, command, and one of the commands from that last meal was quite simple, do this in remembrance of me. When you eat this bread, drink this cup, do so in remembrance of me.

It's worth reminding ourselves that's the fundamental reason why our worship is the way it is – why the Eucharist is at its very heart. We live in such a consumerist society that it is easy to imagine we could come up with something that was more obviously appealing, that might attract more people in. We get bored so easily that we might be tempted to think the eucharist is old hat and we need variety. Or perhaps the many disagreements throughout church history about the eucharist might lead us to think it would just be easier to have something less controversial at the centre of our worshipping life.

But that option isn't open to us. What we do here is a matter of obedience. A matter of command. This is what Jesus wanted us to do. Now, it's fair enough to have different approaches to that. Here at St. Lawrence, the eucharist is the central service every Sunday, week in, week out, without fail. It doesn't, I suppose, have to be that way. Some churches celebrate it less frequently, and that's not necessarily a bad thing. Sometimes, indeed, you value things more if they don't happen all the time. The key thing is not how often the eucharist happens in a church, but how central it is to that church's life.

Well, why is that? Obedience, yes, but why did Jesus say 'do this' in the first place? Well, too much to say in a short sermon, but, in sum, perhaps this. What God wants to happen, above all in our worship, is for His life to be poured into our life. For His life, to be poured into our life. He wants to make us his human expression. His body and blood. His way of being in the world. And this is to happen not because we're tremendously smart and have figured it out, or because we're tremendously good and deserve it. It happens simply as a gift, as something put inside us from beyond. Could you imagine a better way of making that point than by having us come empty handed and be fed, literally fed? As you eat that bread, and drink that wine, God's life is being poured into you from beyond.

And that leads, instantly, to the second *mandatum*, the second command. Wash each other's feet. You are the people God's life has been put inside – and what does God's life look like? Well, we know, we've seen it in Jesus. It looks like getting up from the table, and kneeling down, and taking the dirty, bruised, tired feet of our neighbours and gently washing them. It means setting aside ego, reputation, status and simply tending to each other's most basic needs.

Now, I realise that in saying what follows to people who have made the effort to come on Maundy Thursday evening, who are not just Sunday Christians, that I am preaching to converted. But it is worth reminding ourselves of some very basic Christian truths, because it is so easy to forget them. Why do you come to church? Is it to hear the brilliant preaching, is it for a sense of peace and security, is it for the music, is it to receive the sacrament? Well, none of these are bad reasons in themselves, but they are radically incomplete, because they miss the point of this second command: you come to church to wash each others' feet. You come to church to wash each others' feet.

That is, a Christian community, St. Lawrence's, is meant to be a place where people who are being filled with God's life share that life with each other. How does that happen? When we forget ourselves, when we kneel down, when we humbly tend to each other's basic needs. When we ask how each other are, and wait for the answer. When we listen to each other, deeply, lovingly. When we practically help each other. You can't do any of that if you're not here. And even if you are here, you can't do any of it the real reason you came is to get something out of it. To 'top yourself up', as people sometimes say. No, you come to church to love each other.

Christianity really is astonishingly simple. Awesomely and wonderfully deep, but simple. Do this in remembrance of me. Take the bread, drink the wine, let the life of God fill you. Receive it as a gift. And then: live that life. Leave your ego behind, kneel down and wash each other's feet. That's the meaning of everything we do in church. Think of that as you come to receive tonight, and in the silence that follows this service, ask God to make that deep and simple truth ever more real in your life.

Amen.