

# Seven Actions

## A Service of Prayer for Maundy Thursday



*This reflective service for Maundy Thursday includes prayers and meditations and is designed to be used by one person alone or a family in a household gathered together. If it is used by a family then the different readings and prayers can be said by different voices. If you are following the service alone you can do so either silently or aloud.*

*The liturgy tonight focuses upon the account of the Last Supper in John 13. If you have them available gather together seven candles or tealights to light at different points during the service. However, don't worry if this is not possible. The lit candles offer a reminder of the presence of light even in the darkness of the eve of Good Friday. We will light these same candles again (where available) at the beginning of the Liturgy for Good Friday.*

*Find somewhere quiet to sit. As you read the words from John 13 and the prayers try to enter into the story and then make your own prayerful response.*

### **Opening Prayer**

**God of light and truth,  
grant us peace as we gather tonight, even though, because of  
circumstances, we do so from our own homes.  
May we draw closer to you as we recall again  
the service and suffering of Christ,  
in whose name we meet and pray.  
Amen**

### **Confession and Forgiveness**

*Think for a few moments about the times during this Holy Week when, like the disciples, you have failed to give priority to God in your life.*

**Lord Christ, in the evening of this day,  
forgive us for our lack of attention to you,  
our absence of word and action in following you,  
and our denial of your place within our lives ...**

**Help us to now to know your Spirit with us,  
your gracious forgiveness,  
and your strength in our hearts,  
That we may now more closely follow you.  
Amen**

## **Introduction to the Gospel Reading (John 13) and Candle-lighting (where appropriate)**

*This evening we shall hear part of John's account of the last evening that Jesus spent with his friends before his arrest.*

*Chapter 13 speaks of actions taken, and decisions made. Some were inspired by goodness, and others not. As the words are read we consider where our place might be within the narrative, and we renew our hope, which is in Christ the light of the world, that through him we might come closer to God.*

### **Action One – Washing: John 13:1–5**

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.

*Silence*

**Tonight, O God, we recall that your Son arose from the table to descend to the floor.**

**We rejoice that in his humility he left the things of heaven for the dirt and dust of this world.**

**Give us humility, we pray, that we might discover and follow Christ's way and not our own.**

**Lord, hear us and fill us with your truth.**

*The first candle is lit followed by a pause for reflection.*



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## **Action Two – Cleansing: John 13:6–11**

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.’

### **Short Meditation**

Feet are not everyone’s cup of tea! To take water and wash the feet of the old, the sick, the poor, to take that intimate step of closeness, and to do so in a matter-of-fact way, is a marked act of service.

And to have one’s own feet washed can be accompanied by a painful sense of lost independence, as another does for you what you cannot do for yourself.

Again and again we become clean through water and through forgiveness. But again and again the cleansing grace of God is challenged through our lack of words and lack of action. Then, once again, we need that cleansing grace.

Christ comes and kneels and cleanses us that we might be whole. ‘Unless I wash you, you have no part of me,’ Jesus says to Peter, and Jesus says that to you and me as well.

**Lord God, help us to accept love when it is shown,  
and your love as it is shown through Christ.**

**Lord, hear us and cleanse us through your grace.**

*The second candle is lit, followed by pause for reflection ...*



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### **Action Three – Serving: John 13:12–17**

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.’

### **Meditation**

To sort out the seating plan for a wedding or a formal dinner can be a nightmare. Who might be offended by not being included on the top table? Who should be seated near that table? Who wouldn’t mind sitting with the children? Our egos can be massaged by the importance placed upon us.

Yet Jesus lowered himself to the floor and spoke about servants and messengers being no greater than the master ... and yet the one whom we serve came to serve.

‘Do you know what I have done for you?’ Jesus asks. Well, do we? ‘If you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them,’ says Jesus.

This night we recall the blessedness of following Christ. The blessedness that is not of a throne or palace, nor a promise of ease. A blessedness instead of a towel and a basin, and a crown of thorns and a cross. A way of blessed service here and now, and the promise of peace to come.

**Gracious God, teach us how to serve as we are served.**

**Lord, hear us and fill us with your humble love.**

*The third candle is lit, followed by pause for reflection ...*



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## **Action Four – Betraying: John 13:18–30**

'I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfil the scripture, "The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me." I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am he. Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.' After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, 'Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.' The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking.

One of his disciples – the one whom Jesus loved – was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, 'Lord, who is it?' Jesus answered, 'It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.' So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, 'Do quickly what you are going to do.' Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, 'Buy what we need for the festival'; or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out.

And it was night.

**Loving God, we pray for those who are persecuted  
and betrayed for their faith.**

**Lord, hear us and fill us with your strength.**

*The fourth candle is lit, followed by pause for reflection ...*



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## **Action Five – Leaving: John 13:31–33**

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.’

**Let us pray:**

**Jesus told his disciples that he was going to prepare a place for them. In silence we remember those who have gone before us, who have brought the Gospel to us, who have served Christ amongst us, and who now are in that place prepared also for us.**

**Lord, hear us and fill us with your hope.**

*The fifth candle is lit, followed by pause for reflection ...*



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## **Action Six – Loving: John 13:34–35**

‘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.’

**Jesus commanded his disciples to love,  
even as he knew that betrayal and denial were close at hand.  
We pray for those who are rejected and unloved ...  
We pray for those who are betrayed by those whom they love ...  
We pray for those who deny their faith through fear ...  
We pray for those who this night, and every night, fear for their  
lives ...  
We pray for those for whom this night will be their last ...  
Lord, hear us and fill us with your compassionate love.**

*The sixth candle is lit, followed by pause for reflection ...*



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## **Action Seven – Denying: John 13:36–38**

Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, where are you going?’ Jesus answered, ‘Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward.’ Peter said to him, ‘Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.’ Jesus answered, ‘Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.’

## **Meditation**

There was only one other person waiting as he arrived. The owner was speaking to the man in the chair as he cut his hair. There were strangers in the street, he said. There was a different accent to their voice. A different manner to their dress. It was like being in a foreign land. The waiting customer nodded with a smile and said nothing.

She was with her friends, and the joke she retold was one heard earlier in the day. It was mild in comparison to some, but not so to those who knew the pain of disability or the rejection of difference. The girls laughed, and her closest friend smiled quietly, but said nothing.

He was on his way home after an early appointment, and the driver laughed as he passed the congregation leaving church. 'Look at them!' he said. His passenger, visible in the mirror, turned away to look out of the side window, but said nothing.

**O God, you know that it is often easier and safer  
for us to remain silent when we might challenge.  
To speak with quiet voices when they need to be louder.  
Help us, we pray, re-call us to your service  
as Christ recalled your servant Peter by the lakeside,  
that we may be fed ... and then feed others.**

**Lord hear us and fill us with your courage,  
your love and your humility.  
Help us in the night-time shadows of fear  
to know the continuing light of your presence,  
that we may be seen and heard as your people.  
Amen**

*The seventh candle is lit, followed by pause for reflection ...*



## Closing Prayers

**May we know that the Lord is with us in good times and in bad,  
whether we are alone or gathered together.**

**May we open our hearts to him this night.  
May we know his love within us.**

**Even in the foreboding presence of darkness  
May his light shine forth.**

*The Lord's Prayer*

**We give you thanks and praise, O God,  
that even in the darkness of this night, your light shines.  
We pray for Jesus strength as we  
continue to be his body in this world.  
Amen**

## Closing Words: Mark 14:32–34

They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I pray.' He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, 'I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.'

*There is no final blessing tonight, as the events continue into  
Good Friday tomorrow and then to Easter morning's Resurrection.*

*Leave the candles alight for a few minutes as a sign of hope in our world before  
safely extinguishing them.*



### Sources

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