

SERMON FOR MAUNDY THURSDAY 2020

In the Name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

The party's over.

Nobody actually said so, but it obviously is over, they could feel it and see it in Jesus' face.

It had been fun while it lasted, traveling around and seeing all sorts of new places, even Jerusalem; heady stuff for boys from rural, remote Galilee, so much better than sitting all day in a fishing boat or counting coins or farming or whatever.

They had met all sorts of new people, huge crowds, and seen some truly amazing and mysterious things, miracles you could call them.

It had been exciting, thrilling fun.

It was like being on the ground floor of some great new project that would change Israel, perhaps change the world.

Now it's not fun. Jesus is distant, His eyes on something they cannot see. Jesus is withdrawn, preoccupied, hearing things they cannot hear. It's a serious, sad little dinner party Indeed.

He's made His farewell address. Jesus says “

I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”

“Before I suffer?”

He obviously expects to be leaving, going away.

A loaf of bread, torn and eaten; His body.

A cup of wine poured out, His blood.

Jesus forms a covenant with them. Jesus gives Himself. We all have that covenant.

What is a covenant? Several years ago I was asked to take part in the wedding of a nephew. The wedding was in a very beautiful nineteenth century Roman Catholic Church in Annapolis, Maryland.

The Catholic priest was very gracious in incorporating me into the service.

He gave a brief sermon to the bride and groom saying they were taking part in a "covenant, not a contract."

He said "There is no if in a covenant." In a contract we and God would give only in response to what we, or God, do: in His covenant God gives Himself to us as we are.

Jesus makes His covenant with a diverse and wondering eleven.

Jesus was saying to His disciples, and says to us, "In this bread and this wine I give myself to you."

Was it not strange that their leader and teacher should give Himself to them?

Slowly it sinks in. Jesus loves them sacrificially and without qualifications.

It is a love in which the greatest become the servants of the most humble; the first becomes the last and the last first. The world can be transformed.

If that is what the love of Jesus has been, and Jesus calls us to love one another, the covenant is a commission, a call.

The covenant, the commission, the call is as fresh and clear today as it was to the eleven in the upper room.

Now the call and covenant are ours.

The call was, and is, to serve, in love, all those in need and even those who are not; all the children of God's creation.

It was, and is, a huge task, one that was served on the streets of Jerusalem, the dusty roads of Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth by those who share Our Lord's supper.

Today, and every day, it's our covenant, our call.