

2nd April 2026 – Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12:1-4 [5-10] 11-14

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I began our church year here at St Mary's by talking about freedom. Back in Advent what I had in mind is the freedom that comes from being eccentric: the way that, when they are at their best, Christian people will seem to be moving in orbit around some massive invisible object, in a way that makes them unpredictable. At Christmas I said that Jesus came into the world to be a free person, and to show us what it means to be truly free. More recently, at the beginning of Lent, I put it to you all that Jesus' resistance to evil and temptation marks him out as free.

If Jesus is a truly free person, what does he do with his freedom? Our culture might lead us to expect that a free person will be self-serving, someone who enriches himself at others' expense. Is that what we see Jesus doing? Jesus is clearly a person of power and authority: he knows how to make bread; he knows how to make followers; there are times when he uses his wit and his power to avoid trouble. But we never see him serving himself in the way the devil clearly wants him to. He is consistent; he is a person of integrity.

Later we see the positive effects of Jesus' freedom. He heals; he feeds; he casts out demons; he reconciles people. In these ways he makes the people around him ever more free. He also teaches in a way that makes people look at their traditions in a new light; he is critical of superficial answers, the false peace which hides and ignores the victims it creates. And so he makes enemies, people for whom that false peace has worked, at least for a time. In other words, he is an eccentric character, and he encourages eccentricity in the people around him.

What we see him doing on the night that he was betrayed is the prime example of that. What teacher should have to wash his students' feet? What lord would talk about being broken and fed to others? This is weird teaching; it is a weird example to remember and to follow. If it doesn't provoke us to be weird then we're probably doing it wrong.

But again, in this teaching – in this example – Jesus is making us free.

I give you a new commandment [he says], that you love one another. By this everyone will

know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. [John 13:34-35]

He is not talking about the appearance of love: the desire to use people as objects; the convenient alliance; or my love of myself, extended to people like me. Jesus' love is *like* the love which the world has for people who are of the world [John 15:18-20]; except it is weird: it is for everybody; it makes whole things which the world expects to stay broken. It creates a body.

“Do you know what I have done to you?”, Jesus asks [13:12]. And again he says:

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. [13:16-17]

Let's keep following, and see what happens next.