



Resource Centre

From our Churches

Author: Byron Weber Becker

Church: Mannheim Mennonite Church

Date: April 2001

This resource is part of a larger **From Our Churches** archives available as an inspirational resource to teachers, ministers and others of Mennonite Church Canada. Posted by permission of the author. Permission to reproduce and distribute is granted.

The Last Supper: A Maundy Thursday Re-enactment

Participants:

Narrator:	Footwasher 1:	Accuser 1 (F):
Mary:	Women's Footwashing:	Accuser 2:
Aaron:	Lead Washer:	Accuser 3:
James:	"Peter":	
Lydia:	Narrator:	Pastor:
Peter:		Pastoral Team:
Judas:		Song leader:
John:		

Welcome¹

People are seated in groups around tables. The tables have baskets of bread, plates of cheese and some fruit. The focus of the room is towards the long wall opposite the entrance.

Mary and Aaron enter through the kitchen door. They speak loudly to catch people's attention. If things are really rowdy the narrator will have to calm things down before we begin.

- Mary:** Isn't it incredible, Aaron? I heard that over 100, 000 people² came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover! That's a *lot* of people.
- Aaron:** Wow! I didn't know it was that many! But it's like that every year. People come from far and wide to the Holy city for the Passover festival. We were really lucky to get a room for our group. With 100, 000 people coming you just *know* that it's really tough to find a place. I wonder how Jesus knew who to ask...
- Mary:** Good question. He just told several of the disciples to go into the city. They would see someone carrying a jar of water. Ask him for a room and [*snap fingers*] just like that we had the room.

¹ The gospels are not consistent in their recounting of the events of Maundy Thursday. This service follows none of them exactly but is believed to be reasonably consistent with all.

² *Interpreter's Bible Dictionary*, "Passover".

Aaron: So who gets to play the role of the child for us?

Mary: I don't know. But that is such a neat part of the tradition. A child asks, "So what's this all about?" And then one of the adults explains how God let us out of Egypt when we were slaves. One night Moses told us to butcher a lamb and put the blood on our doorways. That was a sign to the angel to pass over our homes when he spread death through Egypt. I guess that's where the name "Passover" comes from – the angel passed over our homes.

Aaron: After that the Egyptians couldn't get rid of us fast enough! We had to grab our stuff and get out of there fast – our bread didn't have time to finish rising so we had to eat unleavened, flat, bread. And so we eat unleavened bread as part of the remembering traditions ever since.

Mary: Oh, look! Our friends are already here to celebrate the Passover meal.

Pastor: Aaron! Mary! Good to see you! Grab some places and we'll begin!

Pastor: [*Turning to entire group*] Welcome. Tonight we will remember some very significant times in the history of our people. Times when God stepped into human history and significantly changed our understanding of God; times when God stepped into human history and significantly changed our relationship to God. We will also remember that we, both individually and as a people, have sometimes abandoned and denied God. God yearns to draw us close, to hug us tight. Like any child, sometimes we have returned the hug, but sometimes we have pushed God away. For now, though, let's remember God's goodness to us. Let's sing together "Be present at our table, Lord"

[*Song leader – lead out in the first verse, Hymn 457*]

Pastor: Enjoy your meal.
[*Allow the meal to proceed on its own for a while*]

Communion³

Narrator: Jesus said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God [...neither will I] drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

[*Pastoral team comes forward*]

Narrator: Then Jesus took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."
When you are served, please hold the bread until we may all eat together.

³ This section follows Luke except that the double reference to the cup is collapsed into one.

[Pastoral team serves the bread. Pastor asks if all have been served, offers a few words of thanks and then invites all to eat together.]

Narrator: And Jesus did the same with the cup, saying “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”
When you are served, please hold the cup until we may all drink together.

[Pastoral team serves the cup. Pastor asks if all have been served, offers a few words of thanks and then invites all to eat together.]

Pastor: *[Invite us all to sing Hymn 453 – Let us break bread together⁴ – all three verses]*

Mary: *[In a loud whisper so that all can hear]* Aaron, what was that all about?

Aaron: I don’t know. It sure wasn’t a part of the traditional Passover meal. So much of what Jesus says and does seems to come clear several days later. Do you think this one will too?

Mary: I hope so. What are we supposed to do now?

Aaron: Go on eating, I suppose.

[Wait a few minutes while the group continues eating]

Dispute over Greatness⁵

Lydia: *[Loudly, to break into conversations.]* You know James, you and John were just awful several days ago – asking Jesus to seat you beside his throne in Heaven. Shame on you.

James: Well, why not? I figure John and I have been playing pretty key roles among the disciples here so why shouldn’t we have a payoff in Heaven?

Lydia: Why you arrogant little snit! What makes you think you’re so much better than anyone else?

Peter: Yeah! You and John aren’t the only leaders around here. Jesus called me a “Rock” and said that “on this rock I will build my church.”⁶ That sounds pretty important to be!

Lydia: Peter, you’re no better than James and John! Why do you think that *doing* things is so much better than just being? Look at Mary. Jesus sure heaped praise on her for just sitting down and listening while Martha was running around like a headless chicken. When was the last time you guys just sat down and *listened* to Jesus?

⁴ This is definitely chosen for the ironic twist when considered in the context of the next section. Here we sing about breaking bread together, then we see the dispute over greatness.

⁵ The story of the dispute over greatness is recorded in Luke 22:24-30 while footwashing is in John 13:1-20. The stories certainly seem related and so I’ve taken the liberty of juxtapositioning them. Luke does not reveal the content of the dispute nor who was involved; I’ve speculated.

⁶ Matt. 16-16

Narrator: But Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors.²⁶ But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves.²⁷ For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.
²⁸ “You are those who have stood by me in my trials; ²⁹ and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, ³⁰ so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Footwashing

Narrator: Then ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴ got up from the table, [*Lead feet washers get up from the table and go to the kitchen counter to get basins and towels. Each goes to one footwashing area. When people join you, take the lead in washing the first person’s feet.*] Took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵ 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.

Pastor: Please, join us in washing feet. There is a circle of chairs in the Sunday School room for women only and another circle back here for a mixed group. Children, I would invite you to go with your parents, standing behind them and watching what happens.

[People proceed to the footwashing circles. When it is “Peter’s” turn to have his feet washed, begin the following dialog. The women’s group will have different people assigned to these roles. Have some recorded background music to play during the footwashing.]

Peter: “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”

Narrator: ⁷ Jesus answered, “You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”

Peter: ⁸ “You will never wash my feet.”

Narrator: Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.”

Peter: “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”

Narrator: ¹⁰ 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.” ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

[Go ahead and wash Peter’s feet, continuing on around the circle. Peter may have to move things along here since it will likely be a surprise to the person doing the washing. Wait for the following until everyone has re-gathered around the tables.]

Pastor: [*Sing together “Jesus took a towel” – Hymn 449*]

Narrator: ¹²After 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? ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Prediction of Betrayal⁷

Narrator: ²¹After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, “Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.” ²²The disciples looked at one another; uncertain of whom he was speaking. ²³One of his disciples – the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him; ²⁴Simon Peter therefore mentioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. ²⁵So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him,

John: “Lord, who is it?”

Narrator: ²⁶Jesus 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. ²⁷After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “Do quickly what you are going to do.” ²⁸Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. ²⁹Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, “But what we need for the festival”; or, that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

Pastor: Let’s sing Hymn 240, “Go to dark Gethsemane”

Prediction of Denial⁸

Narrator: ²⁶When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

[Lead the whole group out the basement door and into the parking lot, heading for the main church entrance. Keep the group together. Halfway there, continue with the rest of this section.]

Narrator: ²⁷And Jesus said to them, “You will all become deserters; for it is written,
‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’
²⁸But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.”

Peter: ²⁹“Even though all become deserters, I will not.”

⁷ In Luke the prediction of betrayal occurs earlier, as part of Communion. In Mark it occurs before Communion, in John it occurs after the Footwashing. Obviously, I’m following John for a little while – except for John’s omission of Communion.

⁸ This section is from Mark 14:26-31 as it falls in the transition to the Garden and emphasizes the denial of all.

Narrator: ³⁰Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.”

Peter: ³¹[*vehemently*] “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.”

Narrator: And all of them said the same.
[*Continue on into the sanctuary.*]

[*In the sanctuary have it be as dark as possible but still allowing for scripts to be read. Have a spot-light on the cross in the front.*]

Praying in the Garden⁹

Narrator: ³²They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “sit here while I pray.”
[*Seat the people in the back pews in a rather tightly clustered group.*]

Narrator: ³³He took with him Peter and James and John, [*the three go further on up to the front of the sanctuary and have a seat together.*] and began to the distressed and agitated. ³⁴And he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.”

[*Song leader begins singing “Stay with Me” – Hymn 242 – and signals the congregation to join in. After several rounds the narrator will begin reading again. Continue singing until the end of the section.*]

Narrator: ³⁵And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶He said, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.” ³⁷He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? ³⁸Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” ³⁹And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. ⁴⁰And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. ⁴¹He came a third time and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴²Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

[*Singing of “Staying with Me” ends.*]

Arrest

Narrator: ⁴³Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. ⁴⁴Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying,

⁹ This is also from Mark. The three going further with Jesus provides a bit more drama.

Judas: “The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.”

Narrator: ⁴⁵So when he came, he went up to him at once and said,

Judas: “Rabbi!”

Narrator: and kissed him. ⁴⁶Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. ⁴⁷But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ⁴⁸Then Jesus said to them, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? ⁴⁹Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.”

Narrator: ⁵⁰All of them deserted him and fled.

Lydia: ⁵⁰All of us deserted him and fled.

James: ⁵⁰All of us deserted him and fled.

John: ⁵⁰All of us deserted him and fled.

Mary: ⁵⁰All of us deserted him and fled.

Peter’s Denial

Narrator: ⁵⁴Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house. But Peter was following at a distance. ⁵⁵When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. ⁵⁶Then a servant girl, seeing him in the firelight stared at him and said,

[Peter can get up and move to a different location – perhaps just closer to the rest of the congregation – to signify the new location in the story.]

Accuser 1: “This man also was with him.”

Peter: ⁵⁷“Woman, I do not know him.”

Narrator: ⁵⁸A little later someone else, on seeing him, said,

Accuser 2: “You also are one of them.”

Peter: “I am not!”

Narrator: ⁵⁹Then about an hour later still another kept insisting,

Accuser 3: “Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean.”

Peter: ⁶⁰“I do not know what you are talking about!”

Narrator: At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. ⁶¹The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the work of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." [*Pause*]
⁶²And he went out and wept bitterly.

Pastor: Like Peter, let us ponder how we have denied our Lord. You may stay here as long as you like, but when you leave, please do so silently.