



Resource Centre

From our Churches

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A 'Last Supper' Tenebrae and Communion Service **Maundy Thursday**

Introduction:

In Christian tradition, the Thursday before Easter is known as Maundy Thursday – a day in which many churches commemorate Jesus' last supper with his disciples before his arrest later that night. Maundy Thursday worship often takes the form of an evening Tenebrae service, in which lights are gradually extinguished until we come to the end in the darkness of Good Friday.

As a commemoration of the last supper, this service includes an extended communion meal. Participants are invited to gather around tables in a basement or fellowship hall to enter deeply into the meal and its story. Early in the service there is space for a meal to be served. A platter of finger foods can be prepared for each table to share – pita and hummus, cut vegetables, grapes, cheeses, etc. A more formal sharing of communion takes place at a separate point in the service.

This service imagines that we gather together with Jesus and his disciples for this meal. A 'head table' should be set up at a prominent spot in the room, with places set for Jesus and his disciples. Arrange ahead of time for 13 people to play those roles. Consistent dress, all black for instance, can help to set their distinctive characters. Jesus and his disciples do not have speaking roles, but they will take turns extinguishing the candles as the service moves along. A lit candle should be set in front of each place at Jesus' table. Keep lighting in the room dim enough that the mood is intimate and the lit candles are visible.

The service itself consists of gospel readings that move towards the night of Jesus' last supper and arrest. After each reading a candle is extinguished by one of the disciples. Hymns are interspersed at appropriate spots, chosen thematically so as to offer space to reflect on that part of the story. The readings can be done either by one person or by two or three individuals in turn. The readers should stand off to the side, and need not be visible. Songs should be led as unobtrusively as possible. Singing them unaccompanied will help to maintain the sense of intimacy within the service. A quartet or small group could be used to introduce and support songs if that seems helpful.

The readings move towards the night of the last supper itself. Following the words of institution in Luke 22, participants can be invited to come forward to Jesus' own table to receive the bread and the cup of communion. If appropriate, the person playing the character of Jesus can be the primary server.

As the last two candles are extinguished following the readings of Gethsemane and the arrest, you may want to cut room lighting as well so that the final refrain "Stay with me" is sung in the darkness of the night.

Order of Service

Invited to Table

Welcome

Good evening, and welcome to this meal. Tonight is Maundy Thursday, the night on which Jesus shared his last supper, a Passover meal, with his friends and disciples. They have all gathered here, at this table beside me, to eat and drink together with their Lord. We are all gathered around tables as well, with food that has been prepared for us. We will together partake in this meal, remembering that night so long ago. But it's not only the meal that we remember, for this is also the night in which Jesus was betrayed and arrested. As the darkness of this night descends, we are led into the shadows of Good Friday and its cross. We will take some time to eat our meal together, and then we will listen to a series of scriptures from the Gospels that announce the gathering darkness leading up to this night. Jesus knew what was coming, but so often his followers could not understand. So often we do not understand. With each reading, a candle will be extinguished and the darkness will grow deeper. This is the meaning of "Tenebrae" – a service of darkness and shadows. Near the end of the service, we will be invited forward to Jesus' own table to receive the bread and the cup of communion. As we share in these elements at the table of the Lord, we remember the darkness of his passion. But we also celebrate the new life in Christ that is ours even through death by the power of God. For the light yet shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Hymn of Preparation – STJ 101 "La tenebre"

Luke 22:7-13 (Preparations for Passover)

Sung Grace – STS 76 "Prepare a room for me"

Sharing the Meal

The Gathering Dark

Luke 4:1-12 (Temptations of Jesus)

Candle

Hymn – STS 80 – "Jesus walked this lonesome valley"

Luke 9:18-27 (1st Foretelling of death)
Candle

Luke 9:43-45 (2nd Foretelling of death)
Candle

Luke 18:31-34 (3rd Foretelling of death)
Candle

Hymn – STS 81 “When we are tempted”

John 11:45-57 (Plot to kill Jesus from John)
Candle

John 12:1-8 (Mary anoints Jesus)
Candle

Hymn – HWB 593 “O Power of love”

Luke 13:31-35 (Lament over Jerusalem)
Candle

Luke 19:28-48 (Triumphal Entry and Cleansing)
Candle

Luke 22:1-6 (Plot to kill Jesus from Luke)
Candle

Hymn – HWB 254 – “Ah, holy Jesus”

The Bread and the Cup

Luke 22:14-23 (Institution)

Communion

Hymn – HWB 471 “Eat this bread”
Candle

Into the Night

Luke 22:39-46 (Jesus prays at Mount of Olives)
Candle

Luke 22:47-53 (Jesus is arrested)
Candle

Hymn – “HWB 242 Stay with me”