

The Fabric of Jesus' Life

A Maundy Thursday Service

This service was adapted from Karen Schellenberg's liturgy "The Cloth of Jesus" – www.commonword.ca/go/1010.

Props:

Cross, manger, communion table, swaddling bands, tablecloth, robe, towel, curtain/sheet, linen cloth

Gathering

Welcome and Call to Worship

Prayer

Hymn:

Sing the Story 40 We will follow (sung twice)

The Birth of Jesus

1 Luke 2:1-7

2 It certainly wasn't a grand beginning. And you know, it seemed like it should have been. Before the birth, there were angels everywhere—announcing the pregnancy to Mary, appearing in Joseph's dreams, singing in the night skies above the shepherds. Wealthy magi from the East travelled long, long distances to bring gifts and pay tribute. But this child Jesus was born in lowly conditions, laid in a manger, wrapped in bands of cloth. Humble beginnings. And Jesus never seemed to forget this. He could have been a great and famous religious leader in the temple. He was brilliant – already at the age of twelve, Jesus amazed the teachers in the temple with his understanding. And he turned out to be a great teacher himself, an amazing storyteller and orator. Throngs of people followed and came to hear him speak. But Jesus consistently turned away from fame, always seeking out the poor, the ill, the lame, the lepers. His heart was with the marginalized, and always he drew them in, defended them, demanded something better for them.

Jesus' humble birth—the manger and the swaddling bands of cloth—already marked the way he would live with and minister to the people on the edges.

(Place swaddling bands on the manger at the foot of the cross)

Hymn:

Hymnal Worship Book 215 What Child is this (vs. 1-2)

The Tablecloth

3 Jesus grew to be an adult, and began his ministry when he was about 30 years old. He chose his disciples, and for the next 3 years of his life, went from place to place, teaching, preaching, telling stories, healing. And eating. Sharing food, sitting at the table with anyone and everyone.

Mark 2:13-17

4 Shared meals were one of the most distinctive practices of Jesus' public life. Everywhere he went, he freely accepted dinner invitations from anyone, and he liberally invited those he met to sit and eat together with him. He had no concern for the strict social boundaries of his day, for the meticulous concern about religious "correctness" in choosing table partners, nor for the scrupulous avoidance of contamination by the "undesirables" and "outcasts." Jesus sat and ate, sharing bread with all who cared to come. This was not about strict moral criteria, or about being pure and set apart. It was all about welcome, hospitality, and relationship. It was about unconditional acceptance and unconditional love, about accepting each person in all their beauty and in all their woundedness.

At Jesus' table, everyone is welcomed with love and forgiveness.

(Place tablecloth on the communion table.)

Hymn:

Sing the Journey 87 Put peace into each other's hands (vs. 1-4)

The Robe of Jesus

1 Mark 5:25-34

2 The woman had been sick for twelve years. Twelve long, brutal years of bleeding. And when, in desperation, she secretly dared to touch Jesus' cloak, she was made well! The bleeding stopped instantly. It was almost too good to believe! Actually, it was too good to believe... She knew she was well, but who else would believe that? Everyone knew of her illness, an illness that made her ritually unclean, untouchable. And who would actually believe that she had been healed? No one. They would just go on avoiding her, shunning her, treating her like dirt. And what's more, she had just touched the robe of Jesus, the great teacher, without permission, and, well, "stolen" her healing. And, in the process, she had made him unclean. She might be physically well, but she knew she would continue to live with shame, and now also with the guilt of having contaminated Jesus and stolen her healing.

But Jesus stopped. It didn't matter that throngs of people wanted his attention. It didn't matter that he was on the way to heal the daughter of the synagogue ruler. Jesus sought out the woman who had been physically healed, and gave her something more. He called her daughter, a term of love and endearment. He commended her faith and told her to go in peace. Her healing had been freely given, and she did not need to carry any guilt. And, he announced her healing to the crowd, so that everyone would know that she was no longer sick, so that she would no longer be shamed by her community. From Jesus, the compassionate healer, flowed wholeness—physical healing, spiritual healing, social healing.

As we touch the hem of his robe, we know that Jesus is the healer of our every ill...

(Place the robe on the cross.)

Hymn:

Hymnal Worship Book 377 Healer of our every ill

The Towel

3 John 13:1-9

4 For the people of Jesus' time, footwashing was as regular and ordinary as brushing your teeth. After walking along the hot, dusty roads in open sandals, it was necessary to wash your feet for comfort and for cleanliness, especially before sitting down to a meal. If you had guests for dinner, footwashing was an essential part of hospitality. But the host of the meal certainly never washed his guests feet. A slave or servant would do it. In fact, it was considered such a menial, unpleasant task, that in a house-

hold with a hierarchy of servants and slaves, it would always be the duty of the lowest slaves. In a home without any slaves or servants, the host would provide a basin of water and a towel, and the guests would wash their own feet.

For Jesus to wash his disciples' feet was a revolutionary social act. He overthrew the social hierarchies of his day, and called his disciples to mutuality and love. Jesus, Lord and Teacher, was also a humble servant. Jesus, who dared to argue with the Pharisees and scribes, who overturned tables and cleansed the Temple, also knelt down and washed his disciples' feet.

When Jesus took a towel and girded himself, he embodied the strength and humility of a servant-leader.

(Place the towel at the foot of the cross.)

Hymn:

Hymnal Worship Book 449 Jesus took a towel

Communion

Before communion:

As we feel the fabric of Jesus' life, we are invited to be woven in. To be part of the tapestry of justice, welcome, healing and humble love. As we take part in communion this evening, may we commit ourselves to walk in the way of Jesus.

After communion:

As we follow Jesus in life, sharing in his body and blood, may we also follow him to the cross.

Soldiers Gambling for Jesus' Clothes

1 John 19:16b-25a

2 So much mockery. So much scorn. They flogged Jesus, then dressed him in a purple robe and put a crown of thorns on his head. They hailed him King of the Jews, then struck him in the face. They crucified him beneath a sign that read, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." And while he hung there dying, the soldiers divided his clothes amongst themselves and gambled for his tunic. Bystanders and passers-by jeered and taunted him.

(Remove Jesus' robe from the cross)

Despite all the mockery and scorn, despite the seeming failure of it all, Jesus staked everything, even his life, on what he had taught and lived: Identification with the poor and marginalized, a ministry of welcome, love, and healing; the strong, unwavering call for justice; and humble, loving service. This, Jesus proclaimed, is the very fabric of life, the way of the truth. The only way. No matter what the cost. He gave his life, because he refused to live and believe otherwise.

Hymn:

Hymnal Worship Book 252 O sacred Head, now wounded (vs. 1,2,4)

The Tearing of the Temple Curtain

1 Mark 15:33-39

2 The tearing of the temple curtain. It was the tearing open of religious exclusions, social hierarchies, oppressive political systems. It was the dying to all that wounds, subjugates, excludes, shames, and mocks. And in the dying, another way is open, open to everyone, welcoming to all. It is the way of Jesus, the way of hospitality, healing, justice, love. Open are the gifts of God...

(Tear a curtain/bed-sheet in two)

Hymn (or solo):

Hymnal Worship Book 255 – Open are the gifts of God (vs. 1,2,4,5)

The Burial Linen Cloth

3 Mark 15:42-47

4 (*Drape the burial linen over the cross*)

Silence

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