

The Billericay & Little Burstead Team Ministry

Remembering The Last Supper



14 April 2022

7.00 pm Agape Meal

9.00 pm Communion at Emmanuel

Agape Meals at 7.00 pm

Introduction

This Agape celebrates Communion as part of a meal, following the practice of the early church. In our Agape we are attempting to echo the domestic household atmosphere of Communion in the early Church. Agape (pronounced ag-a-pay) simply means 'love.' In the early Church this came to be used as the name for shared meals, which expressed the close fellowship of the community. Communion was usually part of these meals so they also celebrated the sacrificial love of Jesus.

As well as 'love' thanksgiving is also a central theme in Communion. The service is sometimes called the Eucharist, which is the Greek for 'thanksgiving'. The theme of thanksgiving runs through the Agape, culminating in the Thanksgiving prayer in Church.

Our Agape looks back to the Last Supper which was probably a Passover Meal. Jesus celebrated this with his disciples just before his arrest, trial and crucifixion. Jesus gave that meal a new emphasis. He changed the symbolic meaning of some of the elements in that meal, so giving us the Communion service. First our Agape echoes some of the themes of the Passover: themes that come from the story of the Exodus. It goes on to draw out the connection between the Communion service and its Passover background.

The Group Meeting

Leader: Peace be upon this house:

All: May the peace of the Lord rest upon us and upon all who dwell here.

Leader: The Lord Jesus Christ gave us a new commandment:
'Love one another as I have loved you.'

**All: If we love one another God dwells in us
and his love is made perfect in us.**

Thanksgiving for the Meal

The following Thanksgiving is based on the Jewish table-prayers which Jesus might have used at the Last Supper. The Thanksgiving Prayer of our Communion Service probably developed from this kind of prayer.

Leader: Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe, for you nourish us
and the whole world with goodness, grace, kindness and mercy:

All: Blessed are you, Lord, for you nourish all creation.

Leader: We will give thanks to you, Lord our God, because you have given us a desirable inheritance; you have given us the covenant of grace, our citizenship in heaven and our fellowship amongst Christ's people. You have given us our life and food. For all these things we give you thanks and bless your name for ever and ever.

All: **Blessed are you Lord our God, for the earth, for our food and for our inheritance in Christ.**

The First Course of the Meal: The Exodus Story

During the meal the group finds out which person present has committed his or her life to Jesus Christ most recently and that person is chosen to introduce the next session. If everyone in the group has grown up a believer and none had become a Christian by conversion, then the youngest person present should be chosen. This discussion, which is an important part of the occasion, provides an opportunity for those present to share something of their spiritual experience and so encourage one another.

Question: Why do we meet tonight to share this meal and the Communion of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Leader: It was on this night, the night on which Jesus was betrayed, that he celebrated the Passover with his disciples. They remembered how God had delivered their ancestors from slavery, had made them a nation and had given them their own land. Jesus then changed the meaning of the meal so that it became 'the Lord's Supper' and had a new significance for his followers for all time. Our Communion Service has its origins in the actions of Jesus at the Last Supper. First we listen to the Exodus story.

Reading: Exodus 12:1-14

A member of the group explains:

At a Passover meal the youngest person present, representing the next generation, asks the question that begins, 'why is this night distinguished from all other nights?' this is a prompt for an older member of the family to tell the children the story of all that God did for their ancestors at the Exodus. In this way the family keeps the Old Testament Rule that each generation must teach this story to the next generation. The symbolism of each distinctive ritual in the Passover meal is explained. The serious fun of the Passover provides a lively way of teaching young people about their faith. At the same time everyone else is reminded of the history on which their faith stands. In the Passover those taking part are symbolically united with those who tramped out of Egypt centuries before. The words they recite remind them of their solidarity with their ancestors and of the blessings into which they have entered.

'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and the Eternal, our God, brought us forth from thence, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; and if the Most Holy, Blessed be He! – had not brought forth our ancestors from Egypt, we and all our children would still have continued in bondage to the Pharaohs of Egypt.'

Those at Passover are told: 'It is therefore incumbent upon every individual, in every generation to look upon himself, as if he had actually gone out of Egypt.' Because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus anyone who puts their faith in Jesus becomes one of God's people. This means we are joined with God's faithful people in the Old Testament and their story becomes the first chapter in ours. Every Christian, whether Jew or Gentile, can look back to the Exodus as part of the history of their own people, the children of Abraham, the people of faith.

One of the company lights the first candle, adding these words:

We light this candle as a sign of the journey made by all God's people from darkness to light. We celebrate God's mighty acts of deliverance and our part in the story of his people in the Old Testament.

Leader: At Passover the Jewish household is reminded of the responsibility to praise God for his blessings:

'We therefore are in duty bound to thank, praise, adore, glorify, extol, honour, bless, exalt and reverence him who wrought all those miracles for our ancestors and for us; he brought us forth from bondage to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from mourning into holidays, from darkness to great light and from servitude to redemption and therefore let us sing to him a new song.'

We now say part of a praise Psalm used at Passover

All: Praise the Lord, O sing praises you that are his servants, O praise the name of the Lord. Let the name of the Lord be blessed from this time forward for ever. From the rising of the sun to its going down, let the name of the Lord be praised. The Lord is exalted over all the nations, and his glory is above the heavens. Who can be likened to the Lord our God in heaven or upon earth? Who has his dwelling so high yet condescends to look on things beneath? He raises the lowly from the dust and lifts the poor out of the mire. Praise the Lord.

The Second Course of the Meal: Jesus our Saviour

Reading: 1 Corinthians 11:17-29

Leader: The section of Paul's letter that has just been read is almost certainly the earliest account of the changes that Jesus made to the meal he shared with his disciples before his death. He told his disciples to give a new significance to the bread and wine shared in similar meals in future. When someone eats the Passover bread, called the bread of affliction, that person thinks about being joined with those who suffered long ago in Egypt. That person also remembers that the bread is a symbol of sharing in all the benefits that the Israelites enjoyed when they were rescued from slavery. At the Passover celebrated as the Last Supper Jesus gave a new significance to the bread. For his followers it was now to stand for his body, broken in suffering on the Cross.

Eating the bread and drinking from the cup at communion identifies the Christian with Jesus dying on the cross. The cup of wine in the Passover was a thanksgiving for redemption from Egyptian bondage. Now it is in thanksgiving for redemption from a greater bondage, the bondage of sin. Jesus once called his death his exodus (Luke 9:31) it was to bring freedom from slavery to sin and all its consequences.

At the Exodus the Israelites were told to put the blood of a sacrificed lamb on the doorposts of their houses. This would act as protection. The angel of death who would bring judgement on the Egyptians would *pass over* the houses marked with the blood (Exodus 12: 12-13). This is why the meal eaten to celebrate the Israelites' escape from Egypt is called the *Passover*.

The New Testament tells us that those who believe in Jesus and live as faithful disciples are forgiven and reconciled to God through the death of Jesus, his blood shed on the Cross. Using the imagery of the Exodus the New Testament says that we are sprinkled with his blood. For this reason judgement will pass over us. Just as the Passover meal celebrated the Exodus, and called on worshippers to rededicate themselves all over again to God, so every time we hold the Communion Service we restate the death of Jesus and are called to renew our dedication and self-surrender to him. We are to proclaim the death of Jesus in this way until he returns.

A member of the group lights the second candle, adding the words:

We light this candle as a sign of our deliverance in Christ and the good news of the Gospel.

The Third Course of the Meal: Love and Service

Reading: John 13:1-15

A member of the group explains:

Washing the disciples' feet is an act of loving service through which Jesus teaches two important things. First, it is an acted parable about his death. His washing of the disciples feet represents the fact that his death washes away sin. The reading from John's Gospel shows us that unless we allow Jesus to 'wash' us in this way we can have no part in him or the salvation he offers. Secondly, washing feet is another expression of Jesus' love and care for others. He sets us an example. Jesus shows us that we are to serve one another in practical expressions of love. All individualism is to be surrendered. We are to commit ourselves in the fellowship of the Church to care for each other and those outside the Church that need our help. When we come to Communion we recommit ourselves to care for others in this way.

The Christian church has a tradition of symbolically washing feet on Maundy Thursday. The group could do this if arrangements have been made before hand.

One of the company lights the third candle and adds these words:

We light this candle as a sign of the love of Christ and his calling us to share the light of his love with those we know and those we meet.

A period of open prayer is kept, remembering especially those who haven't been able to join us ...

Leader: Jesus said, 'You are the light of the world.'

All: **May God grant us grace to shine as lights in a darkened world.**

The candles are put out by members of the group. These words are said:

As we go from this meal we renew our commitment to walk in the light of God's word and reflect his light and his love in the world around us.

All: **May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.**

Footnote:

We will be leaving our homes and places of fellowship, promptly, without doing any tidying or washing up and we will join other members of our Team Churches at Emmanuel from 8.45 pm for a 9.00 pm start. Whilst you may be disappointed at this hurried departure, it serves as a reminder of the hasty Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, which is a theme of the Passover and of the fact we are pilgrim people with no 'abiding home'. We are called to a great banquet in heaven, and the gathering together of all the redeemed, an event that is anticipated in the Communion itself.

Emmanuel (from 8.45 pm for a 9.00 pm start)

The Peace

Leader: Jesus has given us a new commandment, that we love one another as he has loved us. Let us serve each other with gladness and seek the peace and unity of God's heavenly kingdom.

May the peace of the Lord be always with you:

All: And also with you.

Leader: Let us offer one another a sign of His peace.

SONG: My song is love unknown, my Saviour's love to me:
Love to the loveless shown, that they might lovely be.
O who am I, that for my sake my Lord should take frail flesh and die?

He came from His blessed throne, Salvation to bestow;
But men made strange, and none the longed-for Christ would know:
But O my Friend, my Friend indeed, who at my need His life did spend.

Sometimes they strew His way, and His sweet praises sing;
Resounding all the day hosannas to their King:
Then 'Crucify!' is all their breath, and for His death they thirst and cry.

They rise and needs will have my dear Lord made away;
A murderer they save, the Prince of life they slay,
Yet cheerful He to suffering goes, that He His foes from thence might free.

In life no house, no home my Lord on earth might have;
In death, no friendly tomb, but what a stranger gave.
What may I say? Heaven was His home; and mine the tomb wherein He lay.

Here might I stay and sing, no story so divine;
Never was love, dear King! Never was grief like Thine.
This is my Friend, in whose sweet praise I all my days could gladly spend.

Samuel Crossman. CCL Licence Number: 2646

Talk

Prayers of Intercession

Leader: In the power of the Spirit let us pray to the Father through Christ the Saviour of the world. Father, on this, the night he was betrayed, your Son Jesus Christ, washed his disciples' feet. We commit ourselves to follow his example of love and service. Lord, hear us:

All: And humble us.

Leader: On this night, he prayed for his disciples to be one. We pray for the unity of your Church. Lord, hear us:

All: And unite us.

Leader: On this night, he prayed for those who were to believe through his disciples' message. We pray for the mission of your Church. Lord, hear us:

All: And renew our zeal.

Leader: On this night, he commanded his disciples to love, but suffered rejection himself. We pray for the rejected and unloved. Lord, hear us:

All: And fill us with your love.

Leader: On this night, he reminded his disciples that if the world hated them it hated him first. We pray for those who are persecuted for their faith.

Lord, hear us:

All: And give us your peace.

Leader: On this night, he accepted the cup of death and looked forward to the new wine of the kingdom. We remember those who have died in the peace of Christ. Lord, hear us:

All: And welcome all your children into paradise.

SONG: Man of sorrows! What a name for the Son of God, who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim! Hallelujah! what a Saviour!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned He stood;
Sealed my pardon with His blood: Hallelujah! what a Saviour!

Guilty, vile, and helpless, we; spotless Lamb of God was He:
Full atonement—can it be? Hallelujah! what a Saviour!

Lifted up was He to die, 'It is finished!' was His cry:
Now in heaven exalted high: Hallelujah! what a Saviour!

When He comes, our glorious King, all His ransomed home to bring,
Then anew this song we'll sing: 'Hallelujah! what a Saviour!'

Philipp Bliss. CCL Licence Number: 2646

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Leader: At the Eucharist we are with our crucified and risen Lord. We know that it was not only our ancestors but we who are redeemed and brought forth from bondage to freedom from mourning to feasting. We know that as he was with them in the Upper Room so our Lord is here with us now:

All: Until the Kingdom of God comes.

Leader: The Lord is here:

All: His Spirit is with us.

Leader: Lift up your hearts:

All: We lift them to the Lord.

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God:

All: It is right to give him thanks and praise.

Leader: It is indeed right, it is our duty and our joy, at all times and in all places to give you thanks and praise, holy Father, heavenly King, almighty and eternal God, through Jesus Christ your only Son our Lord. And now we give you thanks because when his hour had come, in his great love he gave this supper to his disciples, that we might proclaim his death and feast with him in his kingdom.

Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising you and saying:

All: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory, Hosanna in the highest.

Leader: Hear us, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, through him accept our sacrifice of praise; and grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit these gifts of bread and wine may be to us his body and blood.

Who in the same night that he was betrayed, took bread and gave you thanks; he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, after supper he took the cup and gave you thanks; he gave it to them, saying, Drink this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

All: Christ has died: Christ is risen: Christ will come again.

Leader: Therefore, Lord and heavenly Father, having in remembrance his death once for all upon the cross, his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into heaven, and looking for the coming of his kingdom, we make with this bread and this cup the memorial of Christ your Son our Lord. Accept through him this offering of our duty and service; and as we eat and drink these holy gifts in the presence of your divine majesty, fill us with your grace and heavenly blessing; nourish us with the body and blood of your Son, that we may grow into his likeness and, made one by your Spirit, become a living temple to your glory.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, by whom, and with whom and in whom, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honour and glory be yours, almighty Father, from all who stand before you in earth and heaven, now and forever.
Amen.

Leader: As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

**All: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
Now and for ever. Amen.**

Leader: We break this bread to share in the body of Christ:

**All: Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

Distribution of Communion

Leader: Draw near with faith. Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ which he gave for you, and his blood which he shed for you. Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

The leader, servers and musicians receive Bread and Wine

Songs of worship will be sung during the distribution of Bread and Wine.

Prayer After Communion

All: **Loving Father, we thank you for feeding us at the supper of your Son. Sustain us with your Spirit that we may serve you here on earth until our joy is complete in heaven and we share the eternal banquet with Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Song: **From heaven you came, helpless babe,
Entered our world, Your glory veiled;
Not to be served but to serve,
And give Your life that we might live**

*This is our God, the Servant King,
He calls us now to follow Him,
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to the Servant King.*

There in the garden of tears,
My heavy load He chose to bear;
His heart with sorrow was torn
'Yet not my will but Yours' He said.

Come see His hands and His feet,
The scars that speak of sacrifice,
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered.

So let us learn how to serve,
And in our lives enthrone Him:
Each other's needs to prefer,
For it is Christ we're serving.

Graham Kendrick. Copyright Thankyou Music 1983. CCL Licence Number: 2646

There is no blessing at the end of Maundy Thursday liturgy. To close our service this evening, the lights will be dimmed and the candles extinguished to symbolize the darkness of Good Friday. Please leave the church in silence. On this occasion, the clergy will not come into the foyer but go straight to the vestry. The church will remain open after the service - you are invited to remain in silence if you wish. Continue to remember all that took place that first Holy Week as you worship in your churches on Good Friday and on the Churches Together Meditative Walk starting at Emmanuel at 11.00 am.

The Billericay & Little Burstead Team Ministry

Phone 01277 632120 **Email** emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org
Web www.billericaychurches.org **Twitter** @BandLBTM