

15th April 22, Maundy Thursday **Do this ...**

Please do sit down, if you haven't already! I'm so sorry not to be with you in person this year, but very grateful to everyone who has stepped in to cover for me and to the tech team for making this recorded sermon possible. Let's pray.

*Loving Lord, on this night of such significance, help us to hear you and respond to your word.
We pray in Jesus' name. Amen*

Passover is on Saturday, just two days away;
technically, it starts at sunset tomorrow, Good Friday.
This year we're perfectly aligned with the gospel narrative of Jesus' passion.

Passover has always been determined by the moon, the months, like Easter is now.
Our first reading from Exodus takes us back to the origin of this calendar for the Jewish people, the calendar there to remind them, from generation to generation, of how they were rescued by God from slavery in Egypt and led into the Promised Land. Patterns and cycles of remembrance, at the heart of their faith, and ours.

Not just dates on a calendar, oral, written, paper or electronic,
but patterns and cycles of remembrance which shape our lives
as God's children and Christ's followers.

The Passover, described in Exodus, is instituted as an annual day of remembrance,
for all the Jewish people, and all those circumcised into the household of faith,
for all time and in all places.

The Last Supper is instituted by Jesus as a remembrance of him,
of his giving of himself without limit, for all the world, Jew or gentile,
for all time, in all places;
not annually but daily, hourly, moment by moment,
the means of making real his loving and powerful presence with us,
the means of reuniting us with God, for ever.

Paul, explaining the Last Supper to the gentile Corinthians,
expresses brilliantly the fact that
Jesus' words and actions are creating the means for his followers
of celebrating and remembering the New Covenant between God and humanity,
just as the Passover meal celebrated and remembered the Old Covenant.

They are words we know well, hearing as we do the Communion prayers which echo Jesus' words,
and Paul's, week by week in church.

This evening I want to highlight just two words.

Jesus told us his followers to **'do this'**.

it's proactive, an experience, something we *do*, a deliberate choice, with clear instructions: **do this**.

Similarly, when the Israelites made ready the Passover meal, it was a very active process,
both in the preparation and the eating,
which was to be done, loins girded, sandals on feet, staff in hand, hurriedly.
The Passover meal was literally food to sustain them on their journey into the unknown,
which turned out to be a traumatic crossing of the Red Sea pursued by the Egyptian army,

followed by forty years in the desert.

Some journey, not dissimilar to that being experienced today by refugees around the world, as they flee oppression and war...

Do this, it's food for the journey.

When we **do this**, we accept Jesus's invitation to eat the new Passover lamb, his own body broken, given, for us.

as the Prayer Book put it, Jesus makes,

a 'full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world'

– the once and for all Passover lamb, the Lamb of God,

through whom we are freed from our slavery to sin.

Do this, accept Jesus's invitation, receive forgiveness and freedom.

But there's a problem.

We are invited to **draw near with faith**, to come forward, hands outstretched.

We can't **do this** where we are, we have to make the choice.

To **do this**, we have to have **faith**.

George Herbert encapsulated the struggle to **do this** in the opening line of his poem, *Love*.

Love bade me welcome, yet my soul drew back...

Aware of our sinfulness, we doubt the grace of God.

Aware of our unworthiness, we doubt the welcome of God.

We take a few steps, then we hesitate.

Quick-eyed love in the poem sees and knows this,

takes us by the hand, draws us in.

We do not walk alone.

Just as Jesus tells us to **do this**,

Love, in Herbert's poem,

commands him to *sit down and taste my meat*.

Since we returned to church together after our pandemic exile, receiving Communion has become, I believe, a more active choice to come forward,

to sanitise our hands, echoing the confession and absolution we have made and received,

to stretch out those hands, in humility and trust,

as we receive Christ's gifts of bread and wine.

We **do this**, in faith.

Gathered with Jesus at the Last Supper were those who would betray, deny and desert him within the next few hours.

He told them to **do this** – so must we.

It's not an intellectual exercise,

a calculation of our moral or spiritual worth.

It's the response to Love, to Jesus. **Do this.**

I close with words from the Iona Community, part of the invitation to Communion:

This is the table not of the righteous, but of the poor in spirit.

This is the table not of the church, but of Jesus Christ.

*So come to this table, you who have much faith and you who would like to have more;
you who have been here often, and you who have not been for a while or ever before;
you who have tried to follow Jesus, and you who have failed;*

Come—not because the Church invites you—

It is Christ who invites you to be known and fed here.

Do this, and feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.

Amen.