

Agape Meal

A feast of Jesus' meals with friends

Not a Seder and not a Eucharist, but fully Church of England compliant as a Service of the Word. This is actually two services, there are versions of some of the sections marked for Maundy Thursday and others for Easter Day.

Ahead of the service, participants will need to have a drink (it will work well if they have a the nicest drink they have in the house), a main savoury part of the meal such as bread and cheese, and something sweet for pudding.

Maundy Thursday Specific elements in Blue	O R	Easter Day Specific elements in Yellow
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For the Minister and the People	For the Minister	
Liturgy/Readings	Reflection	Question
<p>WELCOME</p> <p>OPENING EXPLANATION OF THE MEAL</p> <p>You will need to be ready with a drink to pour (it doesn't matter if it is already poured). A main part of the meal, and something sweet for pudding.</p> <p>We will focus on each part in turn in the service, but if you want to eat at any point no one will mind.</p> <p>The feast is made up from five stories of meals that Jesus ate. We will hear those stories, think about what they mean to us, pray together and eat and drink together!</p>		
<p>OPENING GREETING</p> <p>The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, evermore.</p> <p>Amen</p>		
<p>OPENING ACCLAMATION</p> <p>Alleluia. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia</p>		
<p>COLLECT</p> <p>God our Father,</p>		

<p>your Son Jesus Christ was obedient to the end and drank the cup prepared for him: may we who share his table watch with him through the night of suffering and be faithful. Amen.</p>		
<p>COLLECT</p> <p>God of glory, by the raising of your Son you have broken the chains of death and hell: fill your Church with faith and hope; for a new day has dawned and the way to life stands open in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.</p>		
<p>PRAYERS OF PENITENCE</p> <p>We have not always worshipped God, our creator. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.</p> <p>We have not always followed Christ, our Saviour. Christ, have mercy. Christ, have mercy.</p> <p>We have not always trusted in the Spirit, our guide. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.</p> <p>May the God of love bring <i>us</i> back to himself, forgive <i>us our</i> sins, and assure <i>us</i> of his eternal love in Jesus Christ our Lord.</p>		
<p>ZACCHEUS</p> <p>Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. ²A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. ⁵When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." ⁶So he hurried down and was happy to</p>	<p>Usually we think of Jesus as the host of a meal. We picture him, like in Da Vinci's Last Supper, arms outstretched to welcome us in. But Jesus was much more often the guest than the host. As we gather today, each of us are in our homes. This is our space. At the moment, we are quite literally letting no one in.</p> <p>So as we gather together in this way let's put down any emotional</p>	<p><i>Whose is the meal?</i></p>

<p>welcome him. ⁷ All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” ⁸ Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” ⁹ Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Luke 19: 1- 10</i></p>	<p>and spiritual defences that we have created along with our physical distancing. And welcome Jesus to be a guest at our tables.</p>	
<p><i>Reflection or question</i></p>		
<p>PRAYER</p> <p>Loving God, as we gather for this meal we welcome you. Enter our homes and our hearts afresh. Take all that we have, and help us like Zacchaeus to make amends for our wrongs. Find us here so that we are never lost again. Amen</p>		
<p>THE WEDDING AT CANA</p> <p>There was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴ And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” ⁶ Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it. ⁹ When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after</p>	<p>As we pour ourselves a drink, whether it is apple juice or champagne, let’s think about why we chose it. Perhaps you haven’t been able to get more shopping and it is just the best of a bad bunch of choices. Perhaps you poured a cup of tea because it’s the drink that most sustains you. Perhaps you opened something you’d been saving for a special occasion.</p> <p>This reading isn’t really about the wine, the wine is just the thing that was needed in the moment when Jesus started showing who he was through miracles. But while he was at it, he made the best wine. Even when what he is creating is only a means to an end, he makes the best. The best is just what God’s default option is. Whether it’s the</p>	<p><i>Why is this the drink you chose? What does the best mean to God?</i></p>

<p>the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.” ¹¹ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>John 2: 1-11</i></p>	<p>best of a bad situation or the best in a perfect day, with God, it will always be the best that it can be.</p>	
<p><i>As we pour our drinks and start sipping let's pray.</i></p>		
<p>PRAYER</p> <p>Good Father, we praise you for your goodness, we thank you for our blessings. Even on the worst of days help us to know the gift of your love which turns all things from mundane to glorious. Amen</p>		
<p><i>Open your picnics, start to eat and hear the story of the most famous picnic there ever was.</i></p>		
<p>FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND</p> <p>¹³ Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. ¹⁵ When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to them, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” ¹⁷ They replied, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” ¹⁸ And he said, “Bring them here to me.” ¹⁹ Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰ And all ate and were filled</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Matthew 14: 13-20a</i></p>	<p>At the start of that reading it says ‘Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew’. The ‘this’ it is talking about is that John the Baptist has been killed. John is his cousin, and his companion in turning people’s hearts back towards God. What we are hearing about is grief.</p> <p>Jesus withdraws to grieve. But he doesn’t have a minute to himself, because people need him.</p> <p>We always know, in theory, that the nurse who is doing our tests has a life outside the hospital and has his or her own emotional world going on. But we’ve never been so aware as we are now that key workers who are going out into the world are laying aside their own feelings in order to look after the rest of us.</p> <p>It can be a difficult thing, to compare Jesus’ sacrifice to ordinary every day human sacrifices. There is a risk of minimizing Jesus’ sacrifice. There</p>	<p><i>I wonder what struck you today in the story?</i></p>

	<p>is a risk of idolizing people such as the doctors who have died of the virus.</p> <p>But we shouldn't be afraid to compare. Seeing the compassion of a pall bearer, a checkout worker, a hospital cleaner, is a chance to see the true good in humanity. Knowing they bravely go to work even when they are afraid moves our hearts. Then when we look at Jesus, healing people even when he is grieving, our hearts tell us a deep human truth about what he felt.</p> <p>But what happens next? He's not just compassionate to the few, to the most desperate, to those who would die without him. He won't send anyone away; he has enough love for everyone. And that translates into food.</p> <p>He could have sent them back to their homes and villages to fend for themselves. But he fed them all until they were full. This doesn't mean that we should destroy ourselves in order to do the same. It means our efforts are always held within the bigger compassion of God.</p> <p>This is where we must remember that no matter how much we try to be like Jesus, we are not Jesus, and we don't need to be. The doctor, delivery worker and shelf stacker can hang up their uniforms at the end of the day and, like the rest of us, receive the endless nourishment of a feast that will never run out.</p>	
<p><i>Reflection or question</i></p>		
<p>PRAYER</p> <p>God our provider, we know that when we give you our all, however little that may seem, you make it enough for everyone. We ask your blessing on those who support us in every way. Guide them, protect them, and give them</p>		

<p>all that they need to be full. Amen</p>		
<p>A WOMAN ANOINTS JESUS</p> <p>³While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. ⁴But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? ⁵For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. ⁶But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. ⁷For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. ⁸She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. ⁹Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Mark 14: 3-9</i></p>	<p>This translation comes across a little bit stiff and formal when Jesus says ‘She has performed a good service for me’. Other translations say ‘She has done a beautiful thing for me’.</p> <p>Precision about the original Greek aside, it is a beautiful thing. The point of perfume is that it smells beautiful. Painstakingly mixed oils kept carefully in little bottles and sold for a high price are as precious to us today as they were 2000 years ago. Imagine pouring a bottle of Chanel no.5 over a guest’s head and you have about the right idea.</p> <p>Imagine the intensity of the fragrance. Think about how it would stay in your memory. Pouring out this perfume at this meal was an extravagant gesture which said so many things that could never be put into words.</p> <p>There is something about holding nothing back from Jesus, being wholehearted and generous in her acceptance of him; there is something about sensing Jesus’ death was coming, and wanting him to know she somehow understood; and there is something about saying all of this publicly and without shame.</p> <p>This particular extravagant, beautiful gesture might have been a one off. But we still add costly, unnecessary beauty to our meals. And usually this contains sugar! Yes, there is some practical value in sweet things to eat, it gives us some energy. But we know we don’t really need it. It’s through these extra, unnecessary things that we communicate deeper meaning with our food.</p> <p>A birthday cake says we love you and celebrate that you exist. A</p>	<p><i>Why do you think it mattered to Jesus that we remember this woman?</i></p>

	<p>fancy dessert for guest means I made an effort to bring you joy. A chocolate egg helps our bodies to experience through our senses that there is something to celebrate. But all of those, converted from sugar to words, lose something. A cake is more than just the words iced on top.</p> <p>So we eat our puddings, to celebrate that we are together and God is with us, a truth so wonderful that its sometimes too hard to put into words.</p>	
<p><i>As we pick up our spoons (or fingers) to complete the feast, let us pray.</i></p>		
<p>PRAYER</p> <p>Generous God, You hear us clearly when we can barely find the words to speak. We give you our love and joy and praises. We thank you for all that is good in our lives. As we eat these sweet things help us to bring what is holy and lovely to the forefront of our lives. Amen</p>		
<p>THE LORD'S SUPPER</p> <p>While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."</p> <p>When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Matthew 26: 26-30</i></p>	<p>Food matters in our faith. It isn't just nice, it isn't just energy, it touches our hearts. Maybe it's because of this reading, where we hear of how Jesus gave us the meal we call Communion, Eucharist, Mass, the Lord's Supper. Or maybe it goes even further back, and Jesus chose a meal for this remembrance because food was already so instinctively meaningful for us humans.</p> <p>Perhaps it's because bread is still bread and wine is still wine thousands of years later. Even temples and altars are not as permanent as food.</p> <p>Every meal is a gift from God. In</p>	<p><i>Why do you think Jesus chose a meal as the way to remember him?</i></p>

	<p>every meal we share together, we share in an experience just as Jesus did. The love in community, the worship of God, the celebration of life in this life and the life to come.</p>	
<p>THE WALK TO EMMAUS</p> <p>¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" ¹⁹ He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." ²⁵ Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. ²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him</p>	<p>We have come to the end of our five stories, and like all good stories it has a happy ending. Jesus is raised from the dead! The sadness of the crucifixion will never be forgotten but it is retold. It was only the middle of the story, not its end. A dark tunnel which turned out to have surprising light at the end of it.</p> <p>Good Friday and Easter Day belong together. Without Jesus' death, Easter Day is like being warmed by spring sunshine which turns to chill when you step into the shade.</p> <p>These disciples needed to know the truth that Jesus would die for them, before it meant anything at all that he was raised to new life. Without the day of desolation in between it would have been a magic trick, which had his followers oohing and ahing at how clever he was. But history would not have bothered to record it. His death had to be true, the loss had to be real if this raising to life was going to really matter. Which means they, and us, had to stand in sadness and really feel the loss. Death would have no more power in this world because his love overcame it entirely. But he had to die to make that true.</p> <p>What possible work could there still be to do after destroying death? Here is our God to answer that. Not just an end to death, but a new, fuller, more glorious life with him because he was raised from the dead. God in Jesus has been through every human experience, come out the other side of death</p>	<p><i>I wonder if you have any ideas why Jesus would make himself known in the breaking of bread?</i></p>

<p>strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Luke 26: 13-32</i></p>	<p>itself and left the gate open. Or actually dismantled the gate altogether. There is new life, completely connected to God, if we want it.</p> <p>So our meal has come full circle. We began with Zacchaeus, who didn't know Jesus but was interested enough to welcome him into his home. Now we have disciples who do know him, but even then, he won't force his way in. He waits to be invited, ready to walk on if they don't ask him in, always a guest, always giving us a choice.</p> <p>And for each of us, just as when their eyes opened, we find that wherever we are, when we welcome the risen Christ in, we are truly home.</p>	
<p><i>Reflection or question</i></p>		
<p>AFFIRMATION OF FAITH</p> <p>Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures; he was buried; he was raised to life on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures; afterwards he appeared to his followers, and to all the apostles: this we have received, and this we believe. Amen.</p>		
<p>THE LORD'S PRAYER</p> <p>As our Saviour taught us, so we pray</p> <p>Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.</p> <p>Give us today our daily bread.</p> <p>Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.</p> <p>Lead us not into temptation</p>		

<p>but deliver us from evil.</p> <p>For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.</p>		
<p>BLESSING</p> <p>God, who through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ has given us the victory, give you joy and peace in your faith; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen.</p>		
<p>DISMISSAL</p> <p>Go in peace to love and serve the Lord In the name of Christ. Amen</p>		
<p>DISMISSAL</p> <p>Go in the peace of Christ. Alleluia, alleluia. Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia.</p>		