

The History of the Love Feast

The **LOVE FEAST**, or Agape Meal, is a Christian fellowship meal recalling the meals Jesus shared with disciples during his ministry and expressing the *koinonia* (community, sharing, fellowship) enjoyed by the family of Christ.

Although its origins in the early church are closely interconnected with the origins of the Lord's Supper, the two services became quite distinct and should not be confused with each other. While the Lord's Supper has been practically universal among Christians throughout church history, the Love Feast has appeared only at certain times and among certain denominations.

The modern history of the Love Feast began when Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians in Germany introduced a service of sharing food, prayer, religious conversation, and hymns in 1727. John Wesley first experienced it among the Moravians in Savannah, Georgia, ten years later. His diary notes: "After evening prayers, we joined with the Germans in one of their love-feasts. It was begun and ended with thanksgiving and prayer, and celebrated in so decent and solemn a manner as a Christian of the apostolic age would have allowed to be worthy of Christ."



It quickly became a feature of the Evangelical Revival and a regular part of Methodist society meetings in Great Britain and throughout the English-speaking world. As Methodists immigrated to North America they made Love Feasts an important part of early American Methodism.

While Love Feasts became less frequent in the years that followed, they continued to be held in some places; and in recent years the Love Feast has been revived.

For Christians, the Thursday before Easter is often referred to as "Maundy Thursday." Much like other Christian holidays, it is a day of remembrance for a specific event. In this case, we remember the last meal Jesus shared with his friends before he was executed the following day ("Good Friday"). We call it "Maundy" as shortened reference to the Latin "mandatum"--which means "command" or "mandate." So during Jesus' last meal with his friends he provided them a new mandate, a command they would uphold if they were to remain his disciples. This mandate is recorded in the Gospel of John, chapter 13, verses 34-35: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

The meal Jesus shared with his friends was, itself, a special commemoration. It was the Passover Meal--a remembrance of the Jews exodus from bondage in Egypt. Participants would have reflected on God's great acts in providing for the people. During Maundy Thursday, we are invited to reflect on what God has provided us: especially in the person of Jesus. In Jesus, we believe God has come to us in the form of a person to show us God's own nature. And through this, God calls us to love one another. [www.umc.org]

So what can we do on this special day? Enjoy a meal together. We offer the modified Love Feast liturgy on the reverse of this sheet as a guide.

A Modified Love Feast Liturgy for Maundy Thursday

We invite you to share the responsibility of leading this liturgy with whomever is gathered around your table—or across your on-line connection. May God bless you as you gather.

Pray in Unison:

Be present at our table, Lord;
Be here and everywhere adored;
Thy creatures bless, and grant that we
May feast in paradise with Thee. (JOHN CENICK)

Scripture: John 13:1-17 (NRSV)

13 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. **2** The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper **3** Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, **4** got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. **5** Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. **6** He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" **7** Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." **8** Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." **9** Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" **10** Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." **11** For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." **12** After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?" **13** You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. **14** So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. **15** For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. **16** Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. **17** If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

PRAY:

Father of earth and heaven,
Thy hungry children feed,
Thy grace be to our spirits given,
That true immortal bread.
Grant us and all human race,
In Jesus Christ to prove,
The sweetness of thy pardoning grace,
The manna of thy love. —Charles Wesley

Scripture: Luke 22:14-23

14 When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. **15** He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; **16** for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." **17** Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; **18** for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." **19** Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **20** And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. **21** But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. **22** For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!" **23** Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this.

Scripture: Psalm 145:8-21 (NRSV)

8 The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

9 The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made. **10** All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your faithful shall bless you. **11** They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power, **12** to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

PERSONAL WITNESS

What is your reaction to this scripture? What would you like to share about how you have seen God's grace and goodness?

Prayer

God of us all, as we gather tonight to share this meal together, we remember the meal you shared with your companions on that Holy Week long ago. We remember with thanksgiving your love broken and poured out for all the world. We remember your sacrifice so that we might have life to the full—life eternal with you. Bless this food and this time to our bodies and our spirits that we may grow more in your likeness in the season to come. Amen.

ENJOY YOUR MEAL!

WHEN YOU ARE READY TO CLOSE, SING TOGETHER!

Doxology (Old 100th)

Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.