



HOLY THURSDAY

Thursday, April 21, 2011

Guest Writer for this Unit: Elvin J. Parker III. Elvin, a fourth-generation preacher for 35 years, currently resides in Fort Pierce, FL.

The unit you are viewing, Holy Thursday, is a compact unit. This means that it does not have a supporting cultural resource unit and worship unit. Instead, to enliven the imagination of preachers and teachers, we have provided scriptural text(s) that we suggest for this moment on the calendar along with a sermonic outline, suggested links, books, articles, songs, and videos. For additional information, see Holy Thursday in the archives of the Lectionary for 2008, 2009, and 2010. 2011 is the first year that the African American Lectionary has posted compact units for moments on its liturgical calendar.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment: Holy Thursday

Cleophus J. LaRue wrote in the 2010 African American Lectionary commentary for Holy Thursday:

Holy Thursday, also known as Maundy Thursday, falls on the Thursday before Easter. It commemorates the Last Supper of Jesus Christ with his disciples and the events of his passion which followed. Often, foot washing is included (John 13:3-17) and, in some churches, at the conclusion of the Service, the stripping of the church may occur in which all textiles, crosses, and images are removed or covered until Easter eve. With the setting of the sun on Holy Thursday, the Easter Triduum begins. Triduum literally means “Three Days” and stretches from sunset on Holy Thursday, through Good Friday, and to sunset on Easter. These holy days became a recognized part of the Christian liturgical year by the fourth century. The Christian Church continues to celebrate today to prepare us for meeting the resurrected Christ on the third day.

With this material as our backdrop, we provide a sermonic outline for Holy Thursday.

II. Holy Thursday: Sermonic Outline

A. Sermonic Text: Hebrews 4:14–5:10 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 14) Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. (v. 15) For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. (v. 16) Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

(5: v. 1) Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. (v. 2) He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; (v. 3) and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. (v. 4) And one does not presume to take this honour, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was. (v. 5) So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you’; (v. 6) as he says also in another place, ‘You are a priest for ever, according to the order of Melchizedek.’

(v. 7) In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. (v. 8) Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; (v. 9) and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, (v. 10) having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

B. Possible Title(s)

- i. Jesus: High Priest for all People;
- ii. A High Priest Who Understands; and
- iii. Incarnate, Intermediary, and Intercessor.

C. Point of Exegetical Inquiry

In any text there can be several words or phrases that require significant exegetical inquiry. One exegetical inquiry raised by this text is, without a doubt, the controversy regarding the Christology proffered by it. In particular the concern appears to be with the Incarnate Person of Christ.

The Letter to the Hebrews is considered by most reputable scholars as a pseudonymous writing with insufficient evidence to determine its indubitable authorship. However, its rich contribution to the doctrinal corpus of theological literature and its hortatorical admonitions leaves little room for sufficient argumentation to support excluding it from the Canon.

Of particular interest in today's lection are the difficulties that arise with the concept of Christ, our high priest, being "tempted" as we humans are tempted. The contention is that if Christ is fully divine, how then is it possible for him to suffer human frailty? To take the position that he is subject to the "temptations that are common to humanity" is to diminish his divinity. On the other hand, to suggest that he is fully and completely divine negates his qualification as a high priest as defined according to this passage.

Further, how is it possible for him to be a suitable example and offer a pattern by which we too may overcome the temptations that befall us mere mortals? The key rests in understanding or at best accepting the fact that Jesus is both equally human and divine [divine is lowercased above] and that his humanity cannot possibly diminish his divinity no more than his divinity can elevate his humanity. Herein is the question that has plagued the dictum of theological and Christological thought throughout the ages.

III. Introduction

It has been a hurried rush from Palm Sunday on the way to Easter Sunrise. Jesus' last week on earth has been one full of excitement and challenge—from the time he made his way into the city of Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey to the cleansing of the Temple with a cat-of-nine-tails on Monday, until this hour when he prepares to share the Pesach or Seder Passover with his extended friends, the disciples, on Thursday.

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews gives us some interesting insight as to the nature of the person and role of the Chief Celebrant of this most holy of sacraments. James F. White, in his "Introduction to Christian Worship," assures us that this activity is surely a sacrament as he defines sacrament being "God's self-giving." God in the action of the Eucharist, in the action of the Lord's Last Supper, offers God's self to those who wish to be connected to the Divine.

There is something more than the transubstantive or allegorical usage of the simple elements of common bread and table wine. There is the unavoidable acknowledgment of the Host at the table who is ineluctably present. Jesus, the Christ, has demeaned himself to the role of servant and wine steward. Yet, something infinitely more than these, he is the High Priest and intercessor for the Beloved of God.

IV. Moves/Points

Move/Point One: Jesus, Our High Priest, is chosen by God

- a. Our High Priest comes from Heaven (4:14);
- b. Our High Priest is God's own son (4:14); and
- c. Our High Priest sympathizes and empathizes with our sin challenge (4:15).

Move/Point Two: Human High Priests are limited by their mortality

- a. Mortal flesh is subject to sin;
- b. Human High Priests are subject to their own sins, lusts, and decadence; and
- c. Human High Priests are called after the Order of Aaron in their Ministry.

Move/Point Three: Jesus was selected and called by God to be High Priest to fallen mortality

- a. Jesus did not seek the honor or praise in becoming High Priest, but was appointed by God (5:5);
- b. While Jesus was in human form he was subjected to the temptation of sin (5:7); and
- c. Jesus became our example through his obedience to God (5:8, 9).

V. Celebration

Who is this High Priest Melchizedek? And what of his Order of Priesthood? We find no beginning nor an ending to him. He simply appears on the scene in Genesis to Abraham, the father of the faithful, and offers him what is tantamount to the First Communion. He is the FIRST host at the Table of Divine Love and by implication also the Final Host in Christ Jesus! Yes, Jesus in the same fashion is the host and High Priest on that doleful night before his death. There like Melchizedek, The Righteous King, Jesus too breaks bread and pours wine in Jerusalem, the City of Peace! At that table he offers an everlasting invitation when he declares, "Fellas, this is the Last Supper on this side. I won't have an opportunity to break bread and drink wine with you again until we are in the New Jerusalem, the New City of Peace."

Yes, a New City of Peace! There will be no troubles there! No death or sickness there, no betrayal there, no envy there, no jealousy there, no jockeying for position and power there!! No, in the New Jerusalem my father has prepared mansions bright and fair. In the New Jerusalem the Sun will shine in

perpetual light and the Son of Righteousness (a High Priest like unto Melchizedek) will serve at the Welcome Table! There will be room for all and for everyone. There will be no rich or poor there, no straight or gay there, no Democrats or Republicans there, no left-wing or right-wing there, no liberals or conservatives there, no Have's or Have Not's there, just all of God's children . . . your brothers and my sisters . . . just all of God's children . . . Muslims, Jews, and Gentiles . . . just all of God's children . . . Red, Yellow, Black, and White, . . . just all of God's children gathered together!!!

I heard someone say in the bygone days of my boyhood, "When all of God's children get together . . . what a time! What a time! What a time!!!! We will sit down by the banks of the River . . . What a time! What a time, what a time!!!"

VI. Illustration(s)

Alan Paton's historical novel entitled Ah, But Your Land Is Beautiful contains a true story about a South African judge named Jan Christian Oliver. A black pastor invited him to attend his church service on Maundy Thursday. Because apartheid ruled the land, the judge knew that he would be risking his career if he went. But he wanted to do the right thing, so he accepted the invitation. On his arrival, Judge Oliver learned that it was a service of foot washing, and he was urged to participate. When his time came, he was called forward to wash the feet of a black woman named Martha Fortuin, who had been a servant in the judge's house for 30 years. Kneeling by her feet, he was struck by how weary they looked from so many years of serving him. Greatly moved, he held her feet with gentle hands and kissed them. Martha fell to weeping, as did many others. The newspapers got wind of it and Oliver lost his job and his political career. No doubt, however, he found his soul. In his act of love and service, he was obedient to Jesus' command. Paton, Alan. Ah, But Your Land Is Beautiful. Scribner & Sons, 1996.

VII. Sounds, Sights, and Colors in This Passage

Sounds: The singing of the Hallel prayers for Passover; the scurrying to prepare the elements for the Seder; and the banter and table conversation before the Chief Celebrant begins the sacred meal;

Sights: The traditional vestments worn by the Chief Celebrant at the Seder; the loaf of fresh bread, the bottle of wine at the table; the linen on the table; the ewer and bowl for the ceremonial cleansings of the Kiddush Cups at the table for Passover; the couches around the table; and

Colors: The burgundy color of the wine; the bright colors of the vestments; the earthy colors of natural linens; and the brown bread.

VIII. Songs to Accompany This Sermon

A. Hymn(s)

- Where He Leads Me. By Ernest W. Blandy
- I Gave My Life for Thee. By Frances R. Havergal

B. Well-Known Song(s)

- Near the Cross. Arr. by Angie Curry and Frank Williams

C. Spiritual(s)

- Fix Me, Jesus. Traditional. Arr. by Nolan Williams, Jr.

D. Modern Song(s) (Written between 2005–2010)

- We Give You Glory. By Andraé Crouch

You can review past Lectionary worship units for Holy Thursday to find additional songs and suggestions for planning a worship service for this liturgical moment.

IX. Videos, Audio, and/or Interactive Media

- Refuge Temple House of Prayer, Philadelphia, PA, foot washing service. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-rvQBH7b0qw&feature=related> accessed 5 January 2011
- A dramatic reenactment of Leonardo da Vinci’s painting of the “Last Supper,” featuring Judas’s monologue, for East Liberty Presbyterian Church’s Maundy Thursday service (April 5, 2007). Judas is played by Chuck Nichols. Music is performed by Julieta Ugartemendia. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpDG8eav2iQ> accessed 5 January 2011
- Fix Me Jesus. “There’s a Meeting Here Tonight, A Presentation about the History of the Negro Spiritual.” Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbv8bSnfrB0> accessed 8 January 2011. (This particular video is the Altar Call from the program and although it can stand by itself, it makes more sense when viewed after any of the videos that precede it, which can be found at the following playlist: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8j4et>.)

X. Books and Articles to Assist in Preparing Sermons or Bible Studies Related to Holy Thursday

- Two topics for discussion during Holy Thursday. Mitchell, Bass. “Children’s Messages about Holy Thursday.” Online location: <http://www.homiliesbyemail.com/Special/thursday/kids.txt> accessed 28 January 2011
- Shortly before she died of bone cancer in 1990, Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration Thea Bowman dictated the following beautiful meditation, “Let Us Love One Another During Holy Week,” to inspire Christians to really live Holy Week: “Sister Thea Bowman: Holy Week Meditation.” View from the Choir Blog. Online location:

<http://backpew.blogspot.com/2010/04/sister-thea-bowman-holy-week-meditation.html> accessed 8 January 2011

- Rutledge, Fleming. “Lord, Not My Feet Only.” The Undoing of Death: Sermons for Holy Week and Easter. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002. pp. 69–77. Online location: http://books.google.com/books?id=KW180aThW1QC&pg=PA74&lpg=PA74&dq=lord,+not+my+feet+only%2Bsermon%2Bfleming+rutledge&source=bl&ots=muuCEXP2iC&sig=LVeUzX0-jX-5dIU-QkwQU-Q6D8&hl=en&ei=X2FQTcGuEITpOZTO-Bs&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CCgQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q&f=false accessed 7 January 2011.
- Maxey, Al. “Pondering Pedilavium: A Reflective Examination of the History and Purpose of Foot Washing.” Reflections 31 Aug. 2006 online location: www.zianet.com/maxey/reflx263.htm accessed 23 January 2011
- Collins, Ken. “How to Conduct a Foot-washing service.” Online location: www.Kencollins.com accessed 23 January 2011

XI. Links to Helpful Websites for Holy Thursday Ideas

Foot washing

1. Historical background:
Foot washing or washing of feet is a religious rite observed as an ordinance by several Christian denominations. The name, and even the spelling, of this practice is not consistently established, being variously known as foot washing, washing the saints’ feet, paedalavium, and mandatum. For more on the history of foot washing in the Christian church see, “Foot washing.” Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia. Online location: www.Wikipedia.org accessed 7 January 2011
 2. Lessons to be learned:*
- Christians should be more concerned about serving others than “bossing” others.
 - The foot washing of biblical times was a sign of hospitality; we should practice whatever would be an act of hospitality for us today.
 - We should be willing to render whatever humble, condescending service might be needed by a fellow Christian.
3. Questions for Discussion:*
- What in the way of service do you render for your fellow Christians?
 - Is there anything you would be reluctant to do in the way of serving a fellow Christian?

- Are there any occasions that you might practice literal foot washing?
- What do you think hinders Christians from practicing the kind of service Jesus taught?

*Paul, William E. "Foot washing, John 13:1-17." Bible Truth Outline #17. Online location: <http://preacherstudy.com/WEPaul/bibtru17.htm> accessed 8 January 2011

XII. Notes for Select Songs

A. Hymn(s)

- Where He Leads Me. By Ernest W. Blandy
Location:
African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2001. #550

African Methodist Episcopal Zion Bicentennial Hymnal. Nashville, TN: A.M.E. Zion Publishing House, 1996. #631

Lead Me, Guide Me: The African American Catholic Hymnal. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 1987. #120

The New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition. Nashville, TN: Triad Publications, 2005. #229

Church of God in Christ. Yes, Lord! Church of God in Christ Hymnal. Memphis, TN: Church of God in Christ Pub. Board in association with the Benson Co., 1982. #409
- I Gave My Life for Thee. By Frances R. Havergal
Location:
African American Heritage Hymnal. #233

The New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition. #432

Yes, Lord! Church of God in Christ Hymnal. #266

B. Well-Known Song(s)

- Near the Cross. Arr. by Angie Curry and Frank Williams
Location:
Mississippi Mass Choir. Greatest Hits. Jackson, MS: Malaco Records, 1995.

C. Spiritual(s)

- Fix Me, Jesus. Traditional. Arr. by Nolan Williams, Jr.
Location:
African American Heritage Hymnal. #436

D. Modern Song(s) (Written between 2005–2010)

- We Give You Glory. By Andraé Crouch
Location:
Crouch, Andraé. Mighty Wind. New York, NY: Zomba Recording Corp., 2006.