



Two Liturgies for Agape Meals
Trinity Episcopal Church
Maundy Thursday
April 9, 2020

AN AGAPE MEAL

The word, "agape," is the Greek word used in the New Testament for the highest and broadest kind of self-giving Love, the kind of Love that is our source, our true life in this life and our eternal reality. We have no word capable of describing the God who is Love in any language, but agape seems to come the closest to approximating the limitless and overflowing fullness of Divine Love.

An Agape Meal, or "Love Feast" as it is also called, is an ancient tradition of table fellowship. The practice of holy hospitality precedes the Church, going back to the hospitality Abraham showed to his three unknown visitors (Genesis 18). In the early Church, agape meals were a time of fellowship for "People of the Way" as the earliest Christians were called. The Eucharist, our Christian sacramental celebration instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper, was often a part of these meals, BUT THEY ARE NOT THE SAME THING. Probably between the late 1st century and the mid-3rd century AD, the two feasts became separate. Its use has waxed and waned over the centuries, but "Love Feasts" enjoyed a revival in the 18th century in the Methodist Church with the Wesley brothers, particularly in America and partly because of a lack of ordained ministers to celebrate Holy Communion in the New World.

An Agape Meal is a ritual meal that does not require an ordained person and yet acknowledges our "koinonia," which in Greek means community and sharing. Such meals seek to strengthen communal bonds and foster a spirit of harmony, goodwill and congeniality. They usually include an opportunity to acknowledge our need for forgiveness, especially if some sort of reconciliation among members of the community is warranted. The meal is another way of living out Jesus' 'mandatum' or commandment that we love one another with the same self-emptying love, mercy and forgiveness with which he has loved and still loves us.

Following are two liturgies. The first is called "Liturgy for the Love Feast" and is adapted from the *Iona Abbey Worship Book* with reference to the *United Methodist Book of Worship*. This liturgy can be used as any time. The other is from the *Book of Occasional Services* of The Episcopal Church, approved at the 2018 General Convention. This one is entitled "Agape for Maundy Thursday." Its tone is more solemn as befits the events of this, the last night of Jesus' physical life on earth.

If you are able, follow the Maundy Thursday liturgy tonight. If you are not, then use the "Liturgy for the Love Feast" at another meal once our forty days of Lenten fasting are over and the great fifty days of Eastertide feasting begin!

Note: The designated leader or presider should assign parts before the meal. Remember that these are living words and feel free to make them your own by adding your own prayers and scripture choices. Agape meals include bread (John 6:35, "I am the bread of life..") in some form and water (John 4:13-14, "The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life") and wine to symbolize the pouring out of Jesus' blood of the New Covenant (Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:17-20). A candle is usually lit to remind us that we walk in the Way of the One who said, "I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life..." (John 8:12).

Agapé for Maundy Thursday

The celebration of festal meals is not appropriate during Holy Week. In Christian tradition such festivities take place only after the Lenten fast has been completed by the celebration of the Great Vigil — which is the Passover Feast of Christians — and the reception of Easter Communion. A meatless meal is to be preferred. The setting should be austere and the foods sparse and simple. Appropriate foods include soup, cheese, olives, dried fruit, bread, and wine.

Gathering and Welcome

Presider May mercy, peace, and love be yours in abundance.
 The Lord be with you.

All **And also with you.**

Presider Let us pray.

The presider continues over the wine,

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe. You create the fruit of the vine; and on this night you have refreshed us with the cup of salvation in the Blood of your Son Jesus Christ. Glory to you for ever and ever.

Amen.

Over the bread,

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe. You bring forth bread from the earth; and on this night you have given us the bread of life in the Body of your Son Jesus Christ. As grain scattered upon the earth is gathered into one loaf, so gather your Church in every place into the kingdom of your Son. To you be glory and power for ever and ever.

Amen.

Over the other foods,

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe. You have blessed the earth to bring forth food to satisfy our hunger. Let this food strengthen us in the fast that is before us, that following our Savior in the way of the cross, we may come to the joy of his resurrection. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, now and for ever.

Amen.

During the meal or toward its close, the 17th chapter of the Gospel according to John is read. Where possible, use multiple voices.

Presider A Reading from the Gospel of John.

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

'I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.

I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.

Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled.

But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us,* so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

'Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.'

For the Word of God in Scripture,
For the Word of God among us,
For the Word of God within us,

All Thanks be to God.

Presider Let us say together Psalm 40, verses 1-14

**I waited patiently upon the LORD; *
he stooped to me and heard my cry.**

**He lifted me out of the desolate pit, out of the mire and clay; *
he set my feet upon a high cliff and made my footing sure.**

**He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God; *
many shall see, and stand in awe,
and put their trust in the LORD.**

**Happy are they who trust in the LORD! *
they do not resort to evil spirits or turn to false gods.**

**Great things are they that you have done, O LORD my God!
how great your wonders and your plans for us! *
there is none who can be compared with you.**

Oh, that I could make them known and tell them! *

but they are more than I can count.

**In sacrifice and offering you take no pleasure *
(you have given me ears to hear you);**

**Burnt-offering and sin-offering you have not required, *
and so I said, "Behold, I come.**

**In the roll of the book it is written concerning me: *
'I love to do your will, O my God;
your law is deep in my heart.'**

**I proclaimed righteousness in the great congregation; *
behold, I did not restrain my lips;
and that, O LORD, you know.**

**Your righteousness have I not hidden in my heart;
I have spoken of your faithfulness and your deliverance; *
I have not concealed your love and faithfulness from the
great congregation.**

**You are the LORD;
do not withhold your compassion from me; *
let your love and your faithfulness keep me safe for ever,**

**For innumerable troubles have crowded upon me;
my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see; *
they are more in number than the hairs of my head,
and my heart fails me.**

**Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me; *
O LORD, make haste to help me.**

Presider Let us pray.
Christ our Lord, your love is poured out in death for our sakes: Hold us in your embrace as we wait for Easter's dawn. Comfort us with the promise that no power on earth, not even death itself, can separate us from your love; and strengthen us to wait until you are revealed to us in all your risen glory. **Amen.**

Liturgy for the Love Feast

WELCOME

Leader We come as different people to serve the One God, who calls us to unity as the family of God. Welcome to this meal, in the name of Christ. We come to share in God's love and give God thanks and praise for the abundance we are given through God's Spirit.

All Holy God, we thank you for this home, remembering those who are homeless. We thank you for our health, remembering those who are ill. We thank you for our friends, remembering those who are lonely or friendless. We thank you for all of these gifts and ask you to bless those who do not have them. Amen.

CALL TO THE FEAST

Leader Out of darkness came light;
**All And the power of God was revealed
in the running wave and the flowing air,
in the quiet earth and the shining stars.**

Leader Out of the dust came life;
**All And the image of God was revealed
in the human face and the gentle heart,
in the warmth of flesh and the depth of soul.**

Leader Out of justice came freedom;
**All And the wisdom of God was revealed
in the need to grow and the will to love,
in the chance to know and the power to choose.**

Leader And God looked at the creation,
All And Behold, it was very good.

SCRIPTURE Psalm 34:1

Reader I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall ever be in my mouth.

PRAYERS OF THANKS AND PRAISE

Reader I will keep on thanking God
With constant words of prayer.
I will glory in the living God:
The humble will hear and be glad.

Leader Let us pray.

Living God, our loving parent; you cherish your creation
and we praise you.
With earth, air, water, fire: in our element as your children,
we praise you.
With our lips, with our lives,
in all our diversity, each one made in your image,
We praise you.
Because, in Jesus, you came to share
our human lives, our sorrow and joy,
we praise you.
Because your Spirit is at work today:
encouraging, enabling, surprising us,
We praise you.
Source of life and love,
you give us meaning and purpose
and we praise you.
All Amen.

SCRIPTURE Mark 9:50

Reader "Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt
in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Leader Giving God, you blessed us with saltiness,
All But we became bland.

Leader You trusted us with your Word,
All but we did not keep it.

Leader You lit a flame in our midst,
All but we smothered it with our fears.

Leader God, in your mercy:
All Forgive us.

(Silence)

Leader Forgiving God, we believe that you have called us
All to be salt and light;

Leader and that you offer us time and space and strength
All to begin again.

(Silence)

Leader Giving and forgiving God,
All We thank you.

PASSING THE PEACE

Leader Have salt in yourself, and be at peace with one another.

GIVING THANKS FOR THE WEEK

People are invited to call out single words or brief phrases of thanks for something that happened during the week. A simple response may be used such as "Generous God, we thank you."

Or the following prayer may be said,

All **Glory and gratitude and praise**
Now let earth to heaven raise.
Glory and gratitude and praise
These we offer to God.

SCRIPTURE PSALM 34:8

Reader O taste and see that the Lord is good.

INTRODUCTION TO SHARING THE FEAST

Reader We are all invited to the common table to share in an Agape Feast. We come as siblings in the Holy Family of God. How very good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in harmony! (Psalm 133:1)

PRAYER

Leader As we share this bread,
as we pour out this water,
we thank you, God, for our daily bread
for the food which delights and nourishes us
and for the companionship that sustains us.
We thank you, too, for wine and other drinks
to quench our thirst,
and above all, for the Living Water
with which you enrich

and transform our lives.
Amen.

BLESSING

Leader Loving God,
bless all who have gathered round this table.
May we know the fullness of your presence
at every meal and in all our sharing.

All Amen.