Meeting the Triduum ("Three-Day Liturgy"): Maundy Thursday

How is Maundy Thursday similar or different to the Sunday Holy Eucharist service?

Similarities

- Four readings (Hebrew Scripture, New Testament, Gospel, and Psalm)
- Sermon
- Celebration of the Holy Eucharist

Differences

- Washing of the Feet (currently observed at Good Shepherd)
- Stripping of the Altar (currently observed at Good Shepherd)
- Consecrating a sufficient quantity of Eucharistic elements for Good Friday (not currently observed at Good Shepherd)
- Beginning a Eucharistic Vigil (not currently observed at Good Shepherd)

How did this rite develop?

Early Church

- Originally, no celebration of the Eucharist during Holy Week
- First noted instance comes from a detailed travelogue written in the 4th Century by Egeria on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. She writes that the Eucharist was celebrated at 2pm in the Martyrium, a large basilica built by Helen, mother of Constantine, over the site of the discovery of the true cross.
- The ceremonial reenactment of foot washing began as early as the 7th Century, with abbots washing the feet of monks and kings washing the feet of peasants.
- Roman churches added the Reconciliation of Penitents before the Eucharist.
- Gallican churches observed the stripping and washing of the altar on Good Friday. Roman churches did so on Maundy Thursday.
- In the Sarum Rite, after communion, clergy observed a brief period of refreshment and then returned for the stripping and washing of the altar. Then they moved to the chapter house for the washing of feet, as psalms and antiphons we sung.

English Reformation

- The 1549 Prayer Book (produced during the reign of Edward VI) retained only the Lord's Supper and the Epistle reading that had been used (from 1 Cor 11)

The title of the day was Thursday before Easter. The Gospel reading was the Lukan Passion Narrative split across Wednesday and Thursday.

- Though the Prayer Book made no provision for it, one of the traditions that lived on in Anglicanism was the "royal maundy." For example, it is recorded that in 1560 Elizabeth I "kept her maundy" in the great hall at Westminster by washing the feet of twenty poor women.
- The words "commonly called Maundy Thursday" were added to the title in the 1928 Prayer Book, and the John 13:1-15 account of the washing of the feet was provided as an alternative Gospel.
- The 1978 Prayer Book gives "Maundy Thursday" as the proper title of the day, and restores the ceremony of foot washing as an option. It also includes a rubric that it is from this service, rather than from some other, that consecrated elements are to be reserved for a Good Friday communion.

Liturgical Music associated with Maundy Thursday:

- Ave verum corpus (William Byrd, Mozart)
- Ubi Caritas (Duruflé)
- If ye love me (Thomas Tallis)

What is the theological significance of Maundy Thursday?

- Jesus embodying a kind of radical, even scandalous, intimacy. We might link this kind of intimacy with his practice of welcoming and hospitality.
- Intimacy with Jesus is always invited and never forced or coerced.
- The Stripping of the Altar represents the stripping of Christ's body before his Passion. We may see here resonances of humility, even humiliation, and vulnerability.
- Washing of the feet invites our reflection as we experience the prospect of washing someone's feet or having our own washed.