



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Maundy Thursday 2019
7pm Holy Eucharist of the Last Supper

Any of us who are teachers or parents or the like will probably have asked this question: ‘what did you think you were *doing?*’. It is the most important question for us tonight, perhaps with a slightly altered tone of voice. The crucial question that unlocks everything: What did Jesus think He was doing? What did Jesus think He was doing when He instituted the Eucharist? If we ask that, we’ll have begun.

Jesus’s Jewishness is something we gentile Christians have a long history of foolishly ignoring. So much of what Jesus said and did can only be understood with Hebrew spectacles on, so to speak.

Jesus celebrates Passover 1500 years after the first Passover, when the Jews slaughtered a lamb and daubed the blood over their doorway so that the angel of death would pass-over their homes and kill the Egyptian first born only. Then came the escape from Egyptian slavery and the beginning of the journey to the Promised Land.

Jesus, like every other Jew went to Jerusalem for Passover each year and to the Temple to sacrifice the lamb. Then the Lamb was taken back to where you had found somewhere to stay in a packed Jerusalem to be eaten in the ritual meal that completes the Passover Sacrifice.

The important point for us is that question again: what did Jesus think He was doing? When Jesus celebrated the Passover He, like every other Jew, sang ‘It is because of what the Lord did for *me* when *I* came forth out of Egypt’. The Passover is not remembered as a calling to mind of past events, like a family photo album. It is Re-membered – as opposed to dis-membered – it is put together, present, whole. At Passover every Jew says ‘I’, ‘I’ have been freed from slavery, here and now, God is freeing *me*. Hundreds of years after the events they inhabit, time collapses and those events are made real-ly present in the lives of those who are gathered. That is what Jesus thought He was doing. Hold that thought.

In a short while this church will be ritually destroyed. Everything that makes it a church will be stripped away, everything not bolted down will be scattered. This building grieves our Lord's Passion with us, just as it will rejoice with us on Sunday morning. When the High Altar is stripped it will reveal a lamb. *The Lamb*. 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world'. What did Jesus think He was doing? He was taking the Passover of the Jews and was *fulfilling* it. That Passover was a celebration of freedom from slavery, and food for the journey to the promised land. This Passover in which *Jesus is the lamb* is the means by which we are freed from the slavery of sin and death, not just Egyptians; *He makes Himself our food* for the journey to the true Promised Land, not a bit of desert, but the life of heaven.

That's what Jesus thought He was doing. Let's put these layers together.

Now, as at every Eucharist, the same promise of Real Presence is true for us. Jesus is the Lamb, the great and final sacrifice, present here and now in these mysteries – hidden in Bread and Wine – and saving us. Our rescuing, and our food for the journey through this life and to our heavenly home.

What did Jesus think He was doing? Just what He said. This is the true Passover, 'This is my body', 'Do this'.

Real presence, here and now of Jesus the final and true sacrifice.

There's one more strand to draw in.

For Jews the day begins at sundown, of course. So, what began at the Last Supper only finishes later that *same* day at around 3 o'clock when Jesus dies. One event, the one Passover of the Lord which begins tonight in the Upper Room only *finishes* on the Cross. Making this Feast and His death one event. In the Gospels Jesus makes it abundantly clear to us, that that one single event is present 'here and now' in every Eucharist, and that event is the new Passover, Jesus the Lamb, re-membered: made present and whole in these mysteries. That's why the crucifixion stands above our altar – because that is where we *are* when we come to the Eucharist. Time collapses and we are here. That's why those words of St Matthew are inscribed below it ('This is my body') because that is what the Lord is saying to me and you: from the Cross, at the Last Supper table, here and now. It is one and same reality present to us now. That is what Jesus thought He was doing. That is why tonight we fall on our knees before Him with hearts full of thanks, that overflow into every Sunday Eucharist in the rest of the year.

'O come, O taste and see how gracious the Lord is.'

As the hymn says,

'the blood, all price excelling, Which the world's eternal King,
shed for this world's ransoming.'