

A New Idea for Maundy Thursday Services

by Charles B. Cotton, Jr.

The phrases “There is nothing new under the sun” and “Everything must change, nothing stays the same” seem contradictory. As we approach the Resurrection season in our churches, we are thinking of new ways to celebrate the season with thoughtfulness, intentionality, and creativity. The message is the same, but our approach for presenting it to each generation must change.

For thousands of years Christians all over the world have taken the time to remember and celebrate Maundy Thursday. Some may ask, “What is Maundy Thursday?” The word Maundy is derived from the Latin word *mandatum*, meaning commandment. Maundy refers to the commands Jesus gave his disciples at the Last Supper: to love with humility by serving one another and to remember his sacrifice. Maundy Thursday also reflects the last time Jesus had supper (fellowship) with his disciples. This Thursday is sometimes also referred to as the “Great Thursday.”

To say that powerful and important things happened on this Thursday is a major understatement. The most powerful and important things that happened on this Thursday were instructions were given for life application and the reminder to never forget Jesus Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross of Calvary. In the shadow of the Cross, we are instructed to treat our brothers and sisters with humility by serving them. This helps us in our relationships with one another. In remembering Jesus’ sacrifice for our salvation, we also remember the service we owe to others. This is what makes Maundy Thursday “Great Thursday.”

What can we do to make worship services different this year on Maundy Thursday? Plan a worship experience of music, Scripture, and prayer centered on the sacrifice Jesus made. Take worshipers on a “**Journey of the Sacrifice of Christ.**”

Suggested songs:

- ❖ Opening Hymn: “My Jesus, I Love Thee” by William R. Featherston—African American Heritage Hymnal #574
- ❖ Congregational Selection: “A Perfect Sacrifice” by V. Michael McKay—African American Heritage Hymnal #229
- ❖ Congregational Hymn: “Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone” by Thomas Shepherd—African American Heritage Hymnal #554
- ❖ Praise and Worship: “I Give Myself Away” by William McDowell
- ❖ Song for Corporate Prayer: “I Surrender All” by Judson W. Van De Venter—African American Heritage Hymnal #396
- ❖ Closing Song: “We Remember You” by Kirk Dearman—African American Heritage Hymnal #683

Other songs can be used instead of and in addition to the suggested songs. You have a wealth of resources from which to choose. Look through your CD collection and iTunes

Playlists, listen to your gospel cable channel and your local gospel radio station, ask your church musician colleagues for suggestions, and skim hymnals for possibilities. You will find numerous selections that focus on the sacrifice Christ made at Calvary.

Each song should be followed by a Scripture reading by your associate ministers, deacons, deaconess, and laypersons of your church. Be sure to include teens. Additionally, intentionally place brief prayers focused on the theme “Journey of the Sacrifice of Christ” throughout the service. At the conclusion of the worship service, ask your pastor to give a closing statement about the significance of the service and to bless the Maundy Thursday worship.

Two things will attract African Americans across city, county, and state lines—worship and fellowship. So, in addition to taking worshippers on a “Journey of the Sacrifice of Christ,” after the worship service be sure that you allow time for fellowship by providing refreshments. Invite sister churches and the community to worship and dine with you.

You know the typical (not necessarily healthy) ingredients for our after-worship menus: cake, cookies, red punch, and maybe chicken wings. Let’s push the envelope this year. In line with the historical focus of Maundy Thursday, plan a “Last Supper Meal” for your church. I suggest fish as the main entrée with two nutritious sides, bread, and dessert. During this fellowship, create a slideshow or utilize excerpts from “The Passion of the Christ” or another suitable film to remind the participants of the reality of the moment they are commemorating via the fellowship and meal. This will place the meal and fellowship in context of the “Sacrifice and Journey to Calvary.”

There is nothing new under the sun. People have celebrated Maundy Thursdays for centuries. However, everything must change, nothing stays the same. The message is the same but our approach for presenting it to each generation must change. Consider celebrating this Maundy Thursday in a different way. I hope that this article has provided ideas that you can use to do so.