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Maundy Thursday: Daniel 9 & John 13:1-20

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Alastair Roberts

Daniel's seventy weeks. Jesus washes his disciples' feet.

Some passages referenced:

Jeremiah 25:11-12 (Jeremiah's prophecy of the seventy years); Leviticus 26:40-45 (covenant judgment and restoration); Psalm 141:1-2 (prayer and sacrifice); Exodus 32—34 (Moses' intercession for Israel); Leviticus 25:8-13 (the Year of Jubilee); Daniel 5:31 (Darius receives the kingdom at the age of 62); Daniel 6 (Daniel in the lions' den).

John 12:1-8 (Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus' feet with the nard); John 1:29, 36, 19:36 (Jesus the Passover Lamb); Psalm 41[:9] (David's anticipation of the betrayal of Jesus and the broader events of Jesus' death and resurrection).

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Daniel, chapter 9. In the first year of Darius, the son of Ahasuerus, by descendant Amid, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans, in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the

Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely seventy years. Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes, I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying, O Lord, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and keep His commandments! We have sinned and done wrong, and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from Your commandments and rules. We have not listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

To You, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame, as at this day to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which You have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against You. To us, O Lord, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against You. To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against Him, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by walking in His laws, which He set before us by His servants the prophets.

All Israel has transgressed Your law and turned aside, refusing to obey Your voice, and the curse and oath that are written in the law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against Him. He has confirmed His words, which He spoke against us and against our rulers who ruled us, by bringing upon us a great calamity, for under the whole heaven there has not been anything like what has been done against Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us, yet we have not entreated the favor of the Lord our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by Your truth.

Therefore the Lord has kept ready the calamity and has brought it upon us, for the Lord our God is righteous in all the works that He has done, and we have not obeyed His voice. And now, O Lord our God, who brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and have made a name for Yourself, as at this day we have sinned, we have done wickedly. O Lord, according to all Your righteous acts, let Your anger and Your wrath turn away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy hill, because for our sins and for the iniquities of our fathers Jerusalem and Your people have become a byword among all who are around us.

Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of Your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for Your own sake, O Lord, make Your face to shine upon Your sanctuary, which is desolate. O my God, incline Your ear and hear, open Your eyes and see our desolations and the city that is called by Your name, for we do not present our pleas before You because of our righteousness, but because of Your great mercy. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, pay attention and act, delay not, for Your own sake, O my God, because

Your city and Your people are called by Your name.

While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the Lord my God for the holy hill of my God, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding. At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved.

Therefore consider the word and understand the vision. Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks.

Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. And after the sixty-two weeks an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. His end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war.

Desolations are decreed, and he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abomination shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator. Daniel chapter 9 opens with Daniel's recognition that the seventy years spoken of in the prophecy of Jeremiah chapter 25 verses 11-12, in which Jeremiah foretells the number of years that must pass before Jerusalem's desolations would end, were shortly to be completed.

This occurs in the first year of the reign of Darius, the son of Ahasuerus, whose identity is a matter of considerable debate. Jeremiah's prophecy reads, This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the Lord, making the land an everlasting waste.

Having recognised that the time spoken of by Jeremiah's prophecy had been completed, Daniel recognises then that the people should be returning home, but they aren't doing so yet. So Daniel turned to the Lord in prayer, fasting, dressing in sackcloth and ashes, and confessing the rebellion, sins and unfaithfulness of the people that had led them into exile in the first place. He's approaching the Lord on the basis of, and in terms of the covenant promises that you find in places like Leviticus chapter 26 verses 40-45.

But if they confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me, so that I walk contrary to them, and brought them into the land of their enemies, if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled, and they make amends for their iniquity, then I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac, and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. But the land shall be abandoned by them, and enjoy its sabbaths, while it lies desolate without them, and they shall make amends for their iniquity, because they spurned my rules, and their soul abhorred my statutes. Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not spurn them, neither will I abhor them, so as to destroy them utterly, and break my covenant with them, for I am the Lord their God.

But I will for their sake remember the covenant with their forefathers, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt, in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am the Lord. Daniel prays as a prophetic intercessor for his people.

It may also be illuminating to consider such a prayer in the light of the sacrificial system. Covering is needed for Israel's sins, a purification, and Daniel's prayer is seeking this. Daniel's prayer is a long prayer of confession, in which Daniel confesses the sins of the nation to the Lord.

The prayer is driven by a profound sense of the Lord's holiness and justice, but also by his unswerving faithfulness to his covenant, and by the confidence that, since Judah and Jerusalem are named by the Lord's name, he will not cast them off completely. The prayer alternates between the two parties of the covenant, speaking of the riches of the Lord's justice, faithfulness, righteousness, and truth, while juxtaposing each of these with the injustice, unfaithfulness, unrighteousness, and the falsehood of Israel. The Lord's unchanging character and his commitment to his covenant is the bedrock of Daniel's appeal.

Each trait of the Lord exposes something new about the sin of his people. His faithfulness to the covenant exposes just how unfaithful his people have been. His righteousness exposes the depth of the wickedness and the shame of his people.

His mercy, forgiveness, and long-suffering expose the seriousness of the people's rebellion. His deliverance exposes the extent of his people's ingratitude. His hallowing of his name in the presence of the nations, through his redemption of his people, exposes the perversity of the way that the redeemed people, graciously called by his name, have made themselves a byword among the nations on account of their wickedness and the destruction that resulted from it.

But there's one hope that remains for Israel. Daniel exposes their complete and utter bankruptcy. But he can appeal to the Lord because the Lord has placed his name upon them as his people.

And that's the basis on which Daniel appeals. Gabriel comes to Daniel at the end of the evening sacrifice. The evening tribute, or the offering, came at the beginning of a new day.

It was a memorial, calling upon God to see his people and to act on their behalf. It's essentially what Daniel's prayer has been, a sort of memorial. And elsewhere in Scripture we see the prayers of the people of God described as a memorial or as an evening sacrifice.

Even though there was no earthly tribute being given at this time, Daniel still presents the response to his prayer in terms of that offering. This is a powerful insight into the way that prayer can be considered in terms of ritual. We go to Psalm 141 verses 1 to 2, we see something of this connection between prayer and ritual.

O Lord, I call upon you, hasten to me, give ear to my voice when I call to you, let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. Prayer and song can be thought of as akin to sacrifice, but the connection can work in the other way too, and it can help us better to understand the nature of the sacrificial system. Sacrifices are like dramatised prayers, or like the actions that might go with children's songs.

They are ways in which we enact our request to the Lord, we call for him to act on our behalf, to see us, to hear us, and to deliver us. And the sacrifice is all a way of enacting that. The Lord's Supper is also a memorial.

We memorialise the Lord's death until he comes. The point being that as we celebrate the Lord's Supper we are calling upon God to see us and to act on our behalf on the basis of Christ's prior sacrifice. As a memorial offering it's a sort of enacted prayer.

Gabriel assures Daniel that his pleas for mercy have been heard, and tells him that he has a word and a vision in answer to Daniel's prayer, as Daniel is greatly loved. Like Moses in Exodus chapter 32-34, the prophet loved by the Lord intercedes for a wicked people. The vision concerns 70 weeks.

While Jeremiah's prophecy was about 70 years, Daniel is told of 70 weeks or 77s, not literal weeks, but periods of time often, and I think appropriately, identified as years. We should see the Jubilee themes here. In Leviticus chapter 25 verses 8-13 we see this more clearly.

You shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you 49 years. Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the day of atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land, and you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.

It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property, and each of you shall return to his clan. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you. In it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of itself, nor gather the grapes from the undressed vines, for it is a jubilee.

It shall be holy to you. You may eat the produce of the field. In this year of jubilee each of you shall return to his property.

Leviticus speaks of seven weeks of years in reference to the Jubilee, the time of replanting in the land, as people are returned to their ancestral property, and this extends themes of Pentecost, which is seven weeks of days, and is connected with the establishment of the covenant and the harvest. The event declared to Daniel is a greater awaited jubilee, a jubilee multiplied by ten, a jubilee raised by an order of magnitude. And this awaited event would bring an end to Israel's transgression, confirm the sin or purification offerings, it would cover Israel's liability to punishment, it would establish the reign of righteousness, it would confirm or fulfil that which was foretold by visions and faithful prophets, it would anoint a most holy place, establishing a place for God's dwelling.

I think this anticipates Christ as the Holy of Holies made flesh and his anointing at his baptism. The seventy weeks are subdivided into seven weeks of years, sixty-two weeks of years, and a single final week. The first seven weeks of years relate to the period from Cyrus's decree to the completion of Jerusalem's rebuilding.

The sixty-two weeks concern the time between the completion of the rebuilding and the anointing of the coming prince. This is probably a reference to Jesus' baptism. The messianic prince acts in the seventieth week.

He will be cut off in that week, expelled from his people, dispossessed and condemned to death. But then the city will be destroyed, overwhelmed in a flood of judgment. This refers to the judgment of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, I believe.

He will establish a covenant, he will end sacrifice and tribute, and the city shall be rendered desolate. Christ puts an end to the sacrificial system and establishes a new covenant. Today is Maundy Thursday, where we remember the fulfilment of part of what Daniel's prophecy anticipated, the establishment of a new covenant in the blood of the long-awaited Messiah, the one who took the destiny of the nation upon his shoulders in order to confirm the purification of the people once and for all in a decisive and complete sacrifice of himself, cut off for us all.

The year of Jubilee began on the Day of Atonement, and the greater Jubilee that is foretold to Daniel also involves a great climactic act of atonement or covering, as Christ is the last great sin offering for his people. Sacrifice is put to an end, because all previous sacrifices could only anticipate this sacrifice and depended upon it for their

efficacy. Once this sacrifice has been offered, we need only look back to it and build our lives upon it.

We memorialise that sacrifice, we do not need to offer it again. As the beloved Daniel interceded for his people after the 70 weeks had been fulfilled, so the Messianic Prince, who is our Lord, ever lives to intercede for us after the conclusion of the 70 weeks of years. A question to consider.

This is not the only event that occurs in the first year of Darius's reign. The events of Daniel 6 also occur then. In the final verse of Daniel chapter 5, we are informed that Darius received the kingdom at the age of 62.

We hardly ever are given the age of pagan rulers, and the fact that it is 62 that is the number given here, the same number as mentioned in the prophecy a few chapters later, does not seem to be an accident. How does reading Daniel 6 in the light of this connection help us to see Daniel's experience in the lion's den, both as a fulfilment in miniature of Jeremiah's 70 weeks prophecy, and as an anticipatory fulfilment in miniature of the week of the coming Messianic Prince? John chapter 13 verses 1 to 20 Peter said to him, You shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.

Simon Peter said to him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus said to him, The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.

For he knew who was to betray him. That was why he said, Not all of you are clean. When he had washed their feet, and put on his outer garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me teacher and lord, and you are right, for so I am.

If I then, your lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, A servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. I am not speaking of all of you. I know whom I have chosen, but the scripture will be fulfilled, He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.

I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. Truly, truly, I say to you, Whoever receives the one I send, receives me. And whoever receives me, receives the one who sent me.

John chapter 13 is a very important chapter, helping us to understand the meaning of Christ's death. We should begin by noticing the similarities between John 12 verses 1 to

8 and John chapter 13 verses 1 to 11. There's a meal before the Passover, there's washing of feet, and there's a reference to Jesus' coming death.

In the synoptic gospels, Jesus performs an action symbolizing his death in the Passover meal, instituting the Lord's Supper. But here Jesus performs a different symbolic action with a similar purpose. We might ask why John omits any reference to the institution of the supper and why his chronology seems to place the Last Supper before the celebration of the Passover as well.

Perhaps because John wishes to present Jesus as the Passover Lamb. We can see John exploring this connection in chapter 1 verse 29 and 36 and also in chapter 19 verse 36. Luke is all about meals and eating, but John has focused upon water and washing, particularly within his gospel.

And it's not entirely surprising then that the symbol of Christ's death here is a washing action rather than a meal. Verses 1 to 3 present us with a situation within which all of the key details have been aligned. The scene is fully set for what takes place next.

Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going back to God. And from there, the story proceeds.

Jesus knows that his hour has come. This is heralded in the previous chapter with the reference to the Greeks coming to him. This was a sign that his hour had come.

He's going to depart out of this world to the Father. He's loved his own who were in the world. He's loved them to the end.

And during the supper, at this moment where all these things have come into place, the devil has put into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray him and he knows that the Father has given all the things of this world into his hand, that he has come from God and he is going to God. And then he takes those hands, takes a towel, and washes his disciples' feet and dries them with the towel. The deliberate manner in which the action is entered into underlines its significance.

The more that Jesus is exalted, the more that he stoops to serve his people. The very first thing that Jesus does when he knows that the Father has given all things into his hands is to take those hands and to wash his disciples' feet. The parallel between this action and the action of the previous chapter where Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus' feet with the nard and dries them with her hair should not be hard to see.

In chapter 12 verse 3, the costliness of the nard, the liquid that is used to wash Jesus'

feet, is stressed. And Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet is achieved with a far more costly liquid, with his blood. The foot washing ultimately points to what Jesus is going to do with his death.

It's a symbol of his love for his disciples. He loved them to the end, the end of his death, and of his provision for them. He removes his garments as they will be removed at his crucifixion.

He wraps himself in a linen towel as he will be wrapped in linen cloths at his burial. He lays down his life in order to take it up again, and here he lays aside his garments in order to take them up again. The disciples are reclining to eat and their feet would have been outside of the sphere of conversation and of fellowship, a realm that Jesus enters in order to minister to them.

Once again, the disciples would only fully understand the meaning of Jesus' action at a later point when they saw what he did in the cross and the resurrection. And the washing is absolutely essential. Without Jesus' act of service, we would have no part in him.

And Peter's objection at this point is in some ways parallel to Judas' objection in the previous chapter. Judas objected to the costliness of the liquid that was poured upon the feet of Jesus by Mary of Bethany, and presented this argument in a way that seemed very pious, that it should be given to the poor. Peter's objection is an objection to the symbolic action displaying the necessary work of Christ in ministering to us in his death.

Why should my master, the one who's so much greater than me, engage in this action for me? It all sounds very pious. But Judas is headed for betrayal and Peter is headed for denial. Both of their forms of resistance are resisting something that needs to be done.

What should we make of verse 10, where Jesus says that the one who is bathed does not need to wash except for his feet, but is completely clean? Maybe it could be seen as a reference to baptism and all that that stands for. The feet are the part of the body that comes into direct contact with the judgment-bearing dust, and the foot washing is more akin to perhaps the forgiveness of sins over the course of the Christian life, as we continually return to our first washing. It isn't just a symbol of Christ's death though, it's also a model to follow.

This is the form that our life should take with relation to others. It's the way that we should follow the example of Christ in setting aside our primacy, putting others before ourselves. Jesus quotes Psalm 41 verse 9, speaking of it in relationship to Judas.

And this psalm has an interesting series of resonances. Perhaps the opening statement of it, Blessed is the one who considers the poor, reminds us of Judas and his false concern for the poor in the previous chapter. The psalm then speaks of enemies saying of David that he is lying down, never to rise up, in the verse prior to the one that Jesus

quotes here.

David then praises God that he would raise him up in verse 10 of the psalm, the verse after the one that Jesus quotes. When we see verses quoted in the New Testament, we should always pay attention to the surrounding context, because often the reference to a particular verse is designed to spark a connection between the two passages and to help us to recognise in the surrounding passage that has not been quoted something that illuminates what's happening within the New Testament. All of these themes would seem to be fulfilled in Christ's death and resurrection.

And by referring to Psalm 41, not only Judas's treachery is foretold, but the way in which Christ will be raised from the dead. A question to consider. Maundy Thursday is a time when Jesus presents us with two symbols of his coming sacrifice, the supper and the foot washing.

The supper is intended to be a continual practice as an ongoing memorial of his death, and the foot washing to be a pattern for our continued service of each other within the life of the body of Christ. How can these rituals and patterns help us to understand Christ going to the cross more generally, not merely as a once for all sacrifice in his death, but as an enduring model for our life? Looking at them more closely, what can we learn about the cross-shaped character of the life of the people of God?