Maundy Thursday, April 15, 1965
A MEAL OF MEMORY

Introduction

The celebration of the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, has many moods and many meanings, just as it has many names — Lord's Supper, Communion, Eucharist, Divine Liturgy, Mass, Love Feast, Blessed Sacrament.

In some ways this Holy Supper is like a jewel which as you turn it in the light, you see many facets, each one the same and yet each one different. Thus, it is with the meanings and moods of Communion.

Tonight, our mood is different from the usual as we cele-brate this sacrament. Tonight, is a night to remember. Even though we celebrate Communion many times during each year, Maundy Thursday is the yearly anniversary of the institution of this Sacrament. It is the oldest of all the Holy week observances. Thus, tonight more than anytime else we remember all the events of that first night when Jesus instituted this Holy Supper.

We remember the setting of the last supper, an upper room. We remember the participants, the small group of disciples chosen by Jesus. It was not a very impressive group ac-cording to the way in which men judge other men.

We remember how Jesus washed his disciple's feet and told them to serve one another in similar ways.

Tonight, we also remember the broken fellowship, the be-trayal, the denial, the trial of Jesus and later the cross. Tonight, we remember an upper room in Jerusalem where a group of bewildered, hopeful followers tried to understand what their teacher and master was driving at and striving for.

We remember a shared loaf and a common cup - eastern symbols of fellowship and friendship which nothing could destroy? We remember that this last supper was also a part of the celebration of the Jewish Passover, the celebration of that nation's deliverance; now the whole world, all the people were experiencing a new deliverance through the death and resurrection of one man — Jesus of Nazareth.

We remember also tonight that with the taste of bread and wine still in their mouths, one of the disciples betrayed his master and all of them deserted him. We remember a great empire and, a scrupulous church conniving to put Jesus to death, to get rid of him.

We remember Peter's strong declaration of faith in the upper room and then his denial that he ever knew Christ just a short time later and we remember that the other disciples were not even near enough to be in a position to deny Christ.

We remember that in dark Gethsemane Jesus prayed and while he prayed in anguish, he asked his disciples to watch and pray with him, but instead they fell asleep; fell asleep when Jesus needed them most.

We remember the mocking trial of Jesus; the torture; the cruelty. We remember that no one came forward, NOT ONE, to testify in his behalf; No one came to his defense. Yes, so much happened — this is a night to remember.

But tonight in 1965, we are those disciples gathered around the Lord's table. We are going to eat the bread and drink the cup. There is more to this observance than just remembering the past.

Little did the disciples realize that first Maundy Thurs- day that down through the ages, disciples of Jesus would gather again and again around the Lord's table and receive his strength and power.

And this is also a night to remember because of what God does for us in the present. This Holy Supper not only speaks of the past, but proclaim to us that God is still active, still working — God is here.

Tonight is a night to remember because in this Holy Supper God speaks to us in a language that we can taste and feel. The bread and wine are symbolic of that action taken by God on our behalf. The Communion service is the Gospel in symbolic acts. The highest cannot be spoken. There are truths too profound to be put into words or music. To carry forth their meaning we fall back, as untold generations have done, on the use of symbols other than words, on sym-bolic action — the handshake, which, whether in joy or in sorrow, conveys more than words ever can; the wedding ring given in token of love and faithfulness. It is the silent eloquent token that its wearer has entered a relationship which nothing can sever. So, the church takes bread and wine — the bread is broken and the wine is poured out and we remember a body that was broken and blood that was shed for us.

Every time we celebrate this sacrament, we are reminded with a force greater than words, of the great lengths which God has gone and still goes for us in his love.

And tonight is a night to remember because we are the ones to whom God has entrusted his message of love, salvation, and forgiveness. We eat together at the Lord's table symbolizing our unity in him.

But tonight, we use more symbolic action than usual in our service of worship. In that first Communion service many years ago, one of the followers of Jesus betrayed him. All of them deserted him. Tonight, with the extinguishing of the candles we re-live that experience. We are acting out the betrayal and desertion of Christ by his closest followers, but we know deep down that it is more than just acting. We are also telling the story and portraying our own discipleship.

And tonight, after our service of Communion and the symbolism of the betrayal and desertion, we end on a note of silent hope for through it all we know that the story was not finished when Jesus rose from the table there and led his disciples out to Gethsemane; it was not finished when the candles were extinguished that night and silence reigned again. It was not finished when he was crucified and buried.

We know that after the crucifixion the disciples returned again and again to that upper room, to that place of the Lord's supper. It was here that they found the refuge and strength that they needed to go on. This was the place where they mourned their loss, and this was also the

place where their mourning was turned into joy. For it was here in the same room that Jesus also revealed himself to them risen and alive.

It is small wonder that this night; this upper room; this holy supper; has been a dearer place to Christendom than all the great cathedrals raised by subsequent ages to Jesus' honor.

Come then, let us prepare to celebrate this holy supper. Amen.