On a day like today where I have preached on the same scriptures for the past twelve years it’s a little hard to come up with something fresh and exciting. So in an effort to kick-start the creative juices I went to the commentaries and was not helped much. For example in discussing our reading from Exodus today one commentary gives this exciting bit of information: this passage “introduce[s] a regularized liturgical practice that commemorates and reenacts the saving events of the exodus.” Well yeah I kind of figured that out when God said, “This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.” So a swing and a miss there for the commentaries, and this was the case pretty much everywhere else I turned, which unfortunately for you means you are now stuck with my musings on the subject of Maundy Thursday, our readings and whatever else pops into my mind. So good luck and all that.

What we have in our readings today, at least in the abstract, is the introduction of two major rituals or liturgical practices -- one Jewish and the other Christian. The Jewish one is the Feast of Passover whereas the Christian one is The Eucharist. The foot washing is also included in our readings, but since it would not be considered a central liturgical act of the Christian Church, I am going to skip over that. And what I would like to concentrate on for just a moment today as we begin what certain clergy love to call the Triduum (which does not mean what they think it means but more on that at another time). What I want to concentrate on this Maundy Thursday is why we do liturgical acts at all. That is why do Jews still celebrate a Passover Feast and why do we Episcopalians and the majority of Christians reenact the Last Supper every Sunday? Now there is the obvious answer, at least in terms of the Eucharist, and that is because Jesus told us to, but there are lots of things that Jesus told us to do that we happily ignore (I mean I don’t see a whole lot of people stumbling over each other to turn the other cheek or pick up their cross), so why has this one particular thing taken such root?

Now for what I am about to say I want to take out any discussion of what we believe happens in the sacrament and any grace conferred thereby and instead concentrate solely on the actual mechanical acts of the Eucharist and ask why we do it. And the best reason I can think of, besides Jesus told us to, is because it gives us an identity. It tells us who we are and to whom we belong. One of the major questions in life if not the most major question is “who am I?” And when the answer is not Jean Valjean, most commonly if not always, the answer involves a relationship to something else -- answers like I am my parent’s son, I am an American, or I am a Shark or a Jet. All of these explain who we are but only in relationship to something larger. And as our society has become less religious the answer I am a Christian has shrunk, but the question of identity has not been replaced with nothing but rather a whole host of other identities. If you don’t believe me next time when you are driving look at bumper stickers and see all of the ways that people are announcing who they are – they are an NPR listener or they would rather be riding a Harley. These are placed there to let the world know something of who the driver is or wants to be.

And so in participating in the Eucharist we are also announcing who we are. And so what exactly are we saying? Well Paul says this, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.” Which means what we are proclaiming is, “We remember his death, we proclaim his resurrection and we await for his coming again.” We are reminding ourselves of the truth of the fact that in Christ we have been given eternal life. We have been given the ability to be with God forever. We are proclaiming our identity is based on something that is not fleeting or ephemeral, like a human relationship, a country or a political party. Rather we are saying that the one in whom we believe and the one on whom we rely was raised from the dead and through our participation in that through the sacrament of his body and blood we are also able to do what he did. We are able to say that death is not the final word. Humans need frequent reminders of who they are because we are so easily distracted by shiny objects and go shopping for identities wherever they are to be found. And so the liturgical acts whose foundation we commemorate today remind us of who we are and who we are to be not just this day but forevermore.