

We are wending our way through Holy Week. We began with our Palm Sunday procession and continued with the reading of the account of the Passion of Jesus from Mark, our gospel for this year. Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday we gathered for compline, a quiet service at the close of the day, in which we heard the texts and sang the hymns of this Holy Week. Today we start what the church calls the Triduum, the three days: of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday.

Today we turn our attention to two events that happened at Jesus' Last Supper. The first three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, record the Institution of the Lord's Supper, and John, our gospel for tonight, records Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet. Tomorrow, we observe Good Friday by reading the Passion according to John at two different services, Adoration of the Cross, at which we are invited to behold the cross, and Tenebrae, in which a series of candles are extinguished until the sanctuary is dark. On Holy Saturday we gather for Easter Vigil at St. John's Episcopal in Cornwall in a service reminiscent of the early Christians' all-night Vigil as they awaited the annual announcement of the news of the resurrection—and the return of the "A" word from which we are fasting. On Sunday we worship with our Christian neighbors at a Sunrise service at the river—and then here at King of Kings for the Festival of Resurrection.

Today we're right in the middle of this journey, on Maundy Thursday. Do you know why it's called "Maundy Thursday"? It's not Maunday Thursday, as many of us thought in childhood, but Maundy, spelled M-a-u-n-d-y. The word Maundy comes from the Latin word *mandatum*, which means "command." Another English word that comes from *mandatum* is "mandate." Maundy Thursday concerns the mandate—or command—that Jesus gave his disciples. What did Jesus command?

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke we hear one command; in John we hear another. Both commands are given at the Last Supper. In the synoptic gospels, the three gospels which generally agree on the events in Jesus' life—what are those three gospels? Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In the synoptic gospels, Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper, giving commands about how to celebrate it. In Matthew, he commands his disciples to eat and drink, saying "Take; eat; this is my body," and "Drink from it, all of you." In Mark, he says only, "Take, this is my body." In Luke, he gives them a cup of wine, saying, "Take this and divide it among yourselves." And then he says, "Do this in remembrance of me." In the synoptic gospels, Jesus commands the disciples: "Take, eat, and drink; gather for this meal in remembrance of me."

The gospel of John, which stands apart from the other three gospels because its events and the order of those events differ markedly from the synoptics, also records that Jesus gave his disciples a command at the Last Supper. This command has nothing to do with bread or wine or gathering. John's account entirely omits the institution of the Lord's Supper; he offers no record of Jesus practicing the ritual of communion with his disciples. But at the Last Supper, in John, Jesus does give his disciples a commandment, one that he identifies as "new." We heard this commandment in today's gospel. Did you catch it?

In John's account of the Last Supper, in chapter 13, we hear that Jesus "loved his disciples," and "loved them to the end." Then he put that love into action by washing the feet of the disciples, one by one. In Jesus' time, travelers walked on unpaved, dusty roads in sandals, and when they arrived at a

destination, their feet were tired, hot, and dirty. Washing feet was a way to welcome guests; with feet washed, they felt cleansed and cooled and refreshed. It was the host's responsibility to provide foot-washing as an expression of hospitality, although the physical task itself was assigned to a servant.

At the Last Supper, however, Jesus himself took on the task of washing his disciples' feet; he took the role of a lowly servant doing a menial, dirty, smelly job. Jesus treated foot-washing not as a task beneath him, but as an expression of his love. After washing and drying those twelve pairs of feet, Jesus said, "Do you know what I have done to you? I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet. You also ought to wash one another's feet." Jesus borrowed the task of foot-washing as a metaphor, continuing, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." He instructed the disciples to do even the most menial tasks, even for someone they considered below their status, as an expression of love.

How was it that the disciples were to love one another? As Jesus had loved them. And how had Jesus loved them? By washing their feet. By caring for their bodies. By meeting a very practical need—to cool, cleanse, and refresh dusty, dirty, disgusting feet. Jesus had loved his disciples by washing their feet as a gesture of hospitality, as a model of servanthood. And he commanded them to do the same for each other, to live as servants, always ready to extend hospitality to a stranger or a guest.

So how do we follow Jesus' command to love one another? At King of Kings, how do we love...

- the officers and the Council? We pray for them, listen to them, help them, support them.
- How do we love the pastor? We pray for her, offer her respect, listen to her, support her, take care of her housing, and give our offerings to help pay her salary and benefits.
- What about those who are ill or homebound? We pray for them, send a card or flowers, bring food or medicine, go shopping for them, take them to the doctor or a chemo treatment, and visit them.
- And our children and youth? When we witness their baptism, we promise to pray for them and care for them spiritually. We learn their names, encourage them, chat with them in coffee hour, and correct their behavior. Some of us teach them Bible stories at BING or VBS. Some of us work alongside them at Adopt-a-Highway days or on another project, giving them confidence in their talents.
- How about visitors? We welcome them with a smile or a wave or a word; we introduce them to others. We do the work of constantly reviewing and revising the Bits and ORB and posting on Meta and editing the website so that a guest has correct information about service times or how to schedule a baptism or make a prayer request. We invite them to coffee hour, guide them to the Fellowship Hall, and make sure that they don't end up sitting alone. For the sake of hospitality, to obey Jesus' command, we endure discomfort while talking to a stranger or someone who can't speak English well; we go out of our way to bring an extra chair to a table or make an invitation to Bible Study. Eventually, we help them find a niche at King of Kings, telling

them about church events or teams in need of members. We put into practice the mission statement of the Hospitality Team: to make strangers into friends.

- And how about our neighbors in New Windsor and Newburgh? We share our space with AA, Al-Anon, Narcotics Anonymous, RAPP, and the Newburgh Chorale and the Hudson Valley String Quartet so they can support one another or offer our community the gift of song. We also love our neighbors by collecting food and hygiene items, purchasing Easter Joy gifts, contributing to the Habitat Walk Fundraiser; or volunteering at Meals on Wheels or Baby Steps Baby Pantry or Shepherd's Kitchen, or providing child care for RAPP.
- And our neighbors far away? During Lent we highlighted ways to help neighbors we may never meet: by making financial contributions to Lutheran Disaster Relief, Global Refuge, Habitat for Humanity, Camp Koinonia, or the Kibeta School in Tanzania.

How do you love as Jesus loved you? In your family, at work, in your neighborhood—how do you follow Jesus' command to love one another? How do you love your family members? Maybe you live with them, or maybe you see them regularly, or maybe they live far away and you talk once a week on the phone. Maybe, if you're partnered, you make sure to tell your spouse "I love you" every day. Maybe you help a spouse or an aging parent with daily or seasonal tasks. Maybe you cook together, or maybe one cooks and one cleans up. Maybe you change diapers or do laundry, supervise homework, bathe a child, feed a grandparent, or rock a grandchild to sleep. Maybe you rub tired feet or scratch an itchy back or read bedtime stories. Maybe, when it's necessary, you love your family members by telling painful truths about addiction or depression, offering support without ignoring their pain or yours. How do you love one another at home or in your family?

What about at work? How do you follow Jesus' command to love one another in your working life? Do you take in a treat for a co-worker's birthday? Offer to take someone else's shift so he can spend time with a son on his birthday? Gently correct the technique of a new employee or teach them a new skill? Share strategies about dealing with a difficult boss? Organize a party for a retiring co-worker or a meal schedule for someone who has surgery?

What about in your neighborhood? Do you mow a neighbor's lawn while they are in the hospital? Take them to the ER when they've been injured in a home improvement project? Take over a pan of brownies when you see a moving van? Trade babysitting for helping a high-schooler with an English paper? How do you love others as Jesus has loved you, in your family, your workplace, your neighborhood?

Jesus loved his disciples—and all of us—to the end, by dying—and then rising to eternal life, paving the way for us, too, to receive life. He demonstrated his love by giving up his life. Jesus doesn't expect all of his disciples to follow that example literally, but he does expect us each, in our own way, to receive the love he has—and, then, not to hoard it for ourselves, but to share it with others. How do you, beloved of Christ, love, as Jesus has loved you? AMEN