

Maundy Thursday
“Last Minute Instructions”
John 13:12-17, 31b-35
March 29, 2018
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John 13:12-17 (NRSV)

¹² After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you?” ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Very truly, I tell you, servants^[a] are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

John 13:31-35 The New Commandment

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³² If God has been glorified in him,^[a] God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³ Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ ³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

The longest sermon ever preached, according to the World Book of Records was 60 hours and 31 minutes. John Wesley didn’t even come close!

And the shortest sermon ever preached?

An Episcopalian priest uttered one word: Love.

Some said it was the best sermon he ever gave.

Tonight is Maundy Thursday.

And I’d say **it** could get in the record books for the most common question about Holy Week. What in the world does “Maundy” mean?

Good question. ‘Cause we don’t use the term “maundy” everyday!

For our neighbors, that we’re inviting to join us for worship, (and maybe even some of us) it sounds like a church service that we *THINK* we should want to go to it, but we’re not sure why.

Before we get to the definition, though, let's go back to John's gospel and remember that tonight starts with the palm processional of Jesus on the borrowed donkey. Remember last Sunday's reading?

Jesus has come to Jerusalem for the festival of Passover.

He's the host of the meal for his twelve disciples.

Interesting huh? The Lamb of God and the Bread of Life is hosting this Passover meal!

Jesus knows what's coming (in just a few hours)...betrayal, arrest, being denied and left agonizing alone.

And yet, here he is.

Breaking the bread and pouring the cup.

Eating with them.

Blessing them.

Getting down on his knees to wash their feet.

Knowing what he knows....

...in a situation where we might show anger...

...Jesus serves.

And loves. With grace and compassion.

Our headlines bombard us with news of retaliation and vengeance, and "eye for an eye" cries for justice.

But this night's news, is a different message.

Jesus had done nothing wrong.

His life was non-violence; healing instead.

He'd raised the dead, freed the captives, and brought hope to folks who really needed it.

And in the end, he knew that he was not about to be thanked.

He KNEW he was about to be killed.

Turns out that his goodness and kindness and compassion were more of a threat to the Roman authorities and religious leaders, than any weapon or army. Jesus so radically upset the status quo that'd they decided their only choice was to kill him.

And here we are, the night before that would happen. Jesus wasn't running away or plotting revenge. He WAS preparing for a battle; but not like humanity knows it.

Instead, Jesus was with the ones he loved most. They loved him, too, but they weren't perfect. They knew who he was and what he had done. And they would be the witnesses to his life after he was gone.

And that's where that word "maundy" comes in. Because what do you do if you're Jesus? What do you do if you knew you weren't going to be around much longer, and you NEED to tell the people you love the most, the ones who followed you (sometimes making huge mistakes), how to keep going, what to do, after you're gone?

"Maundy" is Latin for "mandate" or "commandment". So "Maundy Thursday" is "mandate Thursday". It's the night that Christ told his disciples (and praise God for the Bible that WE GET TOLD TOO) exactly what he expected of them. And of us.

The script for a blockbuster movie about almost anyone else would include saying "avenge my death", or "don't let them get away with this."

But this isn't fiction .

This is the telling of someone who turns everything on its head. The mandate, the thing Jesus tells us to do in this passage is this:

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

It probably wouldn't get great reviews at the box office.

But it IS a story that rises above everything else.

And the mandate is at the beginning of what happens when the world does its worst through violence and hatred and fear **and love wins anyway**.

It's a story of love being rejected (and buried,) and yet was still too strong to stay in the ground.

It's not our job to rename Christian holy days, but if it were, we might change "Maundy Thursday" to something we can easily share with "one another": "The Last Thing Christ Really Wanted Us to Know Thursday."

Because that's the message we all need to hear.

Not schmancy Latin translations; OR something we need to check off the to-do list during Holy Week.

We need to hear that this is how Christ said other people would know us: **by how we love one another**.

See Jesus never left people the way he found them.

First, he *loved 'em ...anyway...*

And then, Jesus always made them better.

He sees the possibility of what we can become.

//I love the Peanuts cartoons.

Do you remember how Charlie Brown fell in love with the little red headed girl, but didn't know whether she felt the same way?

He went to extremes to find out if she liked him.

But it wasn't until the last day of school, when he'd missed the bus, and was all bummed out, that he discovered a note that said, "*I like you, Charlie Brown.*"

Signed. The little red headed girl."

Charlie jumped up and down, danced and clicked up his heels.

That's the way life is when you know that you are loved, are genuinely appreciated, are deeply liked.

You begin to find your true self, your true identity.

What would happen, Dear Ones, if we personally discovered and harnessed, not power of the wind or the sun, but we harnessed the power of love in our lives?

See, Jesus isn't leaving us the way he found us either.

He sees the possibilities in us; he knew us even on the night he was betrayed.

And he loves us.

AND he wants others to know that we are *his* beloved disciples.

Maybe THAT will help us remember; not just what this night is about, but what it means to be Christians.

And maybe, *if we always have THAT* commandment, "to love" foremost in our lives, Christ's vision of OUR possibilities would come true.

It's not a fish sticker on our car.

Or a cross around our necks that will TELL others whose we are.

It won't be what we **said** about what we believe or how we voted.

It won't even be righteous anger with good intentions.

Perhaps, instead we could **just be known**, by the one thing Christ wanted us to be **known for**: by how we love.

In a few minutes we will be celebrating Holy Communion together, and you'll hear the words we're told Christ used as he broke bread and gave it to his disciples on a night like this, many years ago.

You'll hear "*on the night Christ was betrayed he took bread, and blessed it, and gave it to his disciples.*"

We hear those words regularly.

And, if you're like me and Pastor Gene, you're lifted up by them.

But what if we heard this, just as often:

"On the night Jesus was betrayed he turned to his disciples and said, "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 have love for one another.”

We don't say that often enough; not in so many words.

But I do think we should be reminded of them AS OFTEN as we break the bread and share the cup.

It's no coincidence Christ said these things on the night of **his** supper, but we sometimes forget.

This year, let's not forget.

Between this Maundy Thursday and the next one, let's not forget what the mandate is.

It's so simple, and yet it demands our whole lives.

That we would live out what the REST of Holy Week is about – God's unending love...that was embodied in Jesus...that can be lived out by those who follow him...and allows us to go, trusting in God's love to share it with others as we go.

Frankly, we can give Christ nothing less.

So, tonight as we eat this holy meal, as simple as it seems on the outside, know that we are choosing no less than to remember Christ's love for us, and to bring that feast to others.

If we all do that, no one would ever have to ask us who we follow.

By our love, they would already know.

Praise be to God! Amen.