

My heart is full as I look around this room and see all of you here, gathered in community for fellowship, friendship, and to share your common love for Jesus. It is Maundy Thursday, Holy Thursday. But to what does Maundy Thursday invite us? To what does it point?

In John's Gospel, Jesus calls the twelve to come, to share with him a meal — a meal that will be the last they share. His is an offering of holy hospitality; an invitation to them to be with him; to dwell with him, to abide with him, and to share in a meal, and in the bread and wine. Like them, we too have gathered this night to share the joy of a simple meal.

But Maundy Thursday is not about gathering to commemorate Jesus' last Supper.

John also tells us how Jesus humbly knelt at the feet of each disciple, took their feet in his hands and gently washed & dried them — a self-giving act of service offered in love, so that they might know what it is both to serve and be served, so that they might understand their need for God and for one another. In past years we too have practiced foot washing, surrendering our resistance and vulnerability into one another's care as we extend and receive this act of generous love.

But Maundy Thursday is not about reenacting Foot Washing.

Our gospels tell us how Jesus blessed bread and wine, enjoined his body and blood to them, and then called for a new sacred ritual of remembrance — one to be practiced both regularly, and especially inside of community — so that the disciples, we and the whole of the church will never forget what Jesus did for us. Aware of how members of the church in Corinth had lost sight of one another only to fall into divisive factions, Paul passes on to them what he had received — the commandment from Jesus that we, in unity, gather to remember, to commemorate, and to partake of his body and blood through the blessing of bread and wine. This ritual is centric to our worship, it is a gift from Christ to us all, so that we may remember, reconnect and be restored. Although we will soon process into the sanctuary to celebrate the Eucharist, and then to strip the church of all visible sacramental objects, Maundy Thursday is Not about this. It is not about remembering Christ's crucifixion and death in the sacraments of bread and wine, nor is it about the absence of candles, crosses, and linens.

Bookended between Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial of Jesus, our Lord Christ gives a new commandment. It is a call to love one another. But wait, is this really new? If we think about it, we know that the command to love is not new. Jesus in Matthew, Mark and Luke references the Great Commandment: *Love the Lord your god with all your*

*heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

But here, in John's gospel, on this night in this particular time and place, Jesus expands upon it: *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.*

Not only does Jesus once again call them to love one another, this time he explicitly tells them *how*. They, and we and all who follow are not only to love, but to love one another as Jesus has loved us. This means both loving those it is easy to love, and loving those we don't want to love: our enemies: those who betray us, deny us, hurt us and condemn us. Jesus is clear and concise, and he is not to be ignored, even if what he commands seems more than we in our humanity can manage. Yes, Jesus sets the bar for love high. Because love has the power to heal, restore, and save us. THIS is what Maundy Thursday is about.

So, On this night, we have gathered to share the fellowship of dinner table. We have recalled Jesus' care of his disciples and the washing of feet. Shortly, we all will gather to remember and celebrate Christ's life, death and resurrection — in the sacred ritual of Holy Communion.

Each of these matter, and help us to mark and honor Maundy Thursday, and they are good and life-giving. And, found at the center of them all is Jesus' commandment to love. With God's help, he invites to clear the clutter of our hearts and to empty them of anything that hinders our willingness to bear love to one another. On this holy night, as we remember Jesus' life and His love for us, we may create space within (points to heart), so that we may hold with tenderness his Passion: his suffering, crucifixion and death.

Jesus came into the world so that we might know God, so that we might know Love and be bearers of love. Thomas Merton wrote:

"The beginning of this love is the will to let those we love be perfectly themselves, the resolution not to twist them to fit our own image. If in loving them we do not love what they are, but only their potential likeness to ourselves, then we do not love them; we only love the reflection of ourselves we find in them." (Thomas Merton, *No Man is an Island*. NY: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1955, 168)

Jesus commands us to love, as Jesus loved us. May we strive to do so, with God's Help.