



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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March 20, 2008  
Maundy Thursday  
John 13:1-15:34  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Exodus 12:1-14  
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 116  
Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 11:23-28  
Gospel: John 13:1-15:34

### A New Command I Give You

We gather together this evening on Maundy Thursday. Have you ever wondered about that word “Maundy”? You might think it has something to do with Communion because this is the night that Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper as they celebrated the Passover meal. You might think it is some different word that means “Communion” Thursday, but that’s not what it means. You just heard him say “Love one another,” and he says it over and over and over if you read the discourse in John from the Upper Room. “By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.” “Love one another; as I have loved you, love one another”—it just keeps ringing out over and over. But “Maundy” doesn’t mean “love.” It’s not called “Love” Thursday.

“Maundy” comes from the Latin word “mandatum” which means “command;” Maundy Thursday is Command Thursday. The name of the day has nothing really to do with the Passover or with the Lord’s Supper, although both of those events are central to the evening. It’s Command Thursday.

Then as you hear Jesus say “A new command I give you, love one another;” you might start scratching your head a little bit. What do you mean “new”? Remember when some teachers of the law came and asked Jesus “what’s the greatest command” and Jesus told them “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind, and the second is like it, love your neighbor as yourself.” Love your neighbor as yourself and love one another; what’s the difference? It’s obviously not a new command. It was there in the law that was given on Mt. Sinai. So why in the world was Jesus saying this is a new command?

He says you “must” love one another. Would that be the new part? Of course not, love one another is the command of the law. It’s just another command. The fact that it is commanded by God is not new. What in the world is “new”?

Look at what Jesus says—it says that when he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I’ve done for you?” he asked them. “You call me teacher and Lord and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I’ve set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” I think there we begin to get an insight into what the “newness” of this command is, don’t we?

The newness of this command centers in doing as Christ has done, and he's not talking about just washing feet. We don't have to get together after church and wash each other's feet. That's not a custom of our day. That is just something he was using as an example for them as he said. But think of the example he set. When he gives them this command "love one another" and now he says "I've given you an example so that you can do what I have done," think about the love he was showing here. Think about who was there in that Upper Room. Gathered around the table, we know for certain, were the 12, right?—the 12 that would accompany him out to the garden later that evening. The 12 that would be off in the distance while he was there praying off in the garden. The 12 that would be snoring as he said "couldn't you watch with me just an hour?" The 12 that would run away when the mob came, except for one; one didn't run away, I suppose. Judas didn't run away because he was leading the mob, right? The 12—his closest associates, his closest friends, the people that I suppose humanly speaking we would expect him to love, right? Isn't that how we love? Don't we love the people that are closest to us, that we've worked with, that we get along with, that we've spent time with and that have showed love to us? But these guys, at that point in time, weren't exactly loveable and cuddly now, were they? But weren't we told, Jesus, when he said "not all of you are clean" when Peter went on and on about "wash me" and "everywhere" and all this stuff, not getting what was going on yet but not letting it stop him from talking, Jesus said, "You are clean" as in "you are forgiven because you have faith in me, though not all of you."

So as Jesus is going around this table that they are reclining at and he is washing their feet, doing the task of a menial servant, he had to stoop down or get on his hands and knees in front of Judas. As he did that, he knew that this is the guy that had sat across the table with the leaders of the Jews and had haggled over the price that they would give him so he would lead them to Jesus so that they could arrest him. "What's it worth to you?—40, 20, 30 sounds good." Jesus knows that as he looks up into his eyes and he washes his feet. He washes the feet of Peter who is going to deny him later that night and say, "I'd rather rot in hell than know this guy" as he calls down curses on himself. He washes Peter's feet?

"As I have loved you, so you must love one another." This begins to open up a whole new view of love is, doesn't it? It's not often what we view as love. There are people I dearly love because they have been such a blessing in my life. There are also people that I suppose I tell myself I love but I don't like them all that much. But if you want me to get down and do something like get on my hands and knees in front of those people that I don't really like that much? Would I really love them enough to do something like that—to put myself on the line, to serve them, to say "you are more important than I am, you are above me, I am going to put your interest ahead of my own"—that gets a little tougher, doesn't it?

That's the kind of love he is talking about though, right? Think about the disciples for a minute. Jesus told them that they weren't going to understand what he was telling them, but they would understand later. Think about them as they thought back to this night. Think of what they must have thought later on as they saw one of their own, Judas, leading the mob. Think of as they ran away and as they talked with one another the vile, the bile, the hatred, the bitterness that would have been in their hearts towards

Judas. How could he betray us like that? How could he do such a thing? You wonder if later on they ever looked back at that night and in their mind's eye they could still see Jesus there washing his feet, Judas' feet, and then saying "As I have loved you, you must love one another." I'm assuming that maybe they are like me, but I'm guessing that they had to really struggle with carrying bitterness in their hearts against Judas, don't you think?

You know how we are when someone has done something that hurts us? Someone has done something that offends us or irritates us or brings pain and suffering into our life; we have a tendency maybe instead of love them as Christ loved us, we kind of love the taste of that bitterness in the back of our throat when we think about them. We kind of like the salty taste of remembering how they hurt us and letting that hatred and that grudge kind of fester and stew in the back of our mind. We seem to have a greater desire to carry that around with us. Then, there are times that you and I will not talk about them to someone else and pat ourselves on the back because we are so loving even though in our hearts we hate them with every ounce of our body.

"As I have loved you, you must love one another." God is commanding us to love even those that are unlovable, to love those who haven't earned our love, to forgive those who have hurt us, forgive them in our hearts, to not carry that grudge; because when he went to the cross, he carried Judas' sins. He carried Peter's sins. He carried the 12's sins. He carried your sins. He carried my sins. He carried the world's sins and none of us had done anything so that we deserved it or earned his love. He loved us by showing us the full extent of his love 24 hours later when he died and was in the tomb. He endured the agony of hell because he loved us to this full extent of his love. And when you and I hear this command "As I have loved you, so you must love one another," it's a humbling command because we don't do it. Maybe sometimes we soar to some heights through God's Spirit living in us and we love others in a way that begins to approach Jesus, and to God be the glory when you and I do that out of our faith. But to do it perfectly at all times and in all ways, you and I don't come close.

That's why it's so precious to us that Jesus comes to us again tonight and says "as I have loved you." He wants us to look at his love as we taste it and touch it and receive his body and blood under the bread and the wine and he tells us "as I have loved you, I gave this. I shed this blood so that your sins are forgiven." He gives us this reminder of his love in the Word and in the water that washed away our sins at our baptism. He gives us this beautiful, beautiful reminder of his love that actually gives us the forgiveness of our sins. Such is his love for us that he gives us all these different ways to bring it to us again and again and again when we are weighed down by the guilt of our sins, when we see in the mirror of his law how we are not loving as he has loved us. He lifts us up by the hand and says "I forgive you. I was perfect in your place. I loved perfectly because I know you can't. Here, you are forgiven. Now get up and go forward. And as I have loved you, work hard at loving that way. And when you fall, come back to me and I will assure you that you are forgiven and that will strengthen you through my Spirit so that you will go forward and you will begin to love. Repeating gossip and rumors won't even become an option because of love." Helping others won't become a thing that we have to weigh. We will want to do it because we want to thank the God who loved us enough to take away our sins.

Beyond that, when we do love others, we won't want to pat ourselves on the back. We won't want others to notice it. We will want to do it because we want to thank the God who loved us with this incredible love. "As I have loved you" so we get to love one another. What a blessing it is as God works in us so that we do this.