



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

April 17, 2014

Pastor Randy Ott

Maundy Thursday

First Lesson: [Exodus 12:1-14](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 115](#)

Second Lesson: [1 Corinthians 11:23-28](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 13:1-15, 34](#)

Sermon Text: [John 13:34](#)

### Love One Another

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow redeemed:

“Maundy” in Maundy Thursday comes from the Latin and it literally means “command” Thursday. It comes from this verse that I just read to you from John’s account of the events of Maundy Thursday. We focus on the command that God has given his disciples. We see what that command is. And then we see how the Lord equips us and empowers us to carry out this command as we focus on these words today.

What is striking is that Jesus says “A new command I give you.” What is new about the command to love? When Jesus was asked earlier in his ministry, what is the first and greatest command, he told the guy who asked him, “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.” All of God’s commands we are told can be summed up in that one word “love.” So why is Jesus saying this is a new command? This isn’t new. This is an old command. This is what God has always said. This is the fulfillment of the Law, to love. Love the Lord your God. Love your neighbor as yourself. If you do that perfectly, you’ll keep every commandment perfectly. So what is new about it?

I suppose one of the things that makes it new is Jesus says, “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” If you remember the context in which he is saying “as I have loved you,” we’ll hear it later in our Gospel, Jesus had just got done washing the disciples’ feet. They had come together on Thursday evening. They were at the Feast of Unleavened Bread. They were going to celebrate the Passover meal after sundown and Passover had begun. Before the meal, usually there would be someone that would wash everyone’s feet, but no one was doing it. So Jesus did it. When he got to Peter, you might remember how Peter said, “No, don’t wash my feet. You shouldn’t do such a thing.” They were no doubt feeling a bit put in their place because none of the disciples wanted to do it and then here is Jesus, their teacher, their leader, washing their feet. Think about that.

Here is the One who created the universe, wrapping a towel around his waist, taking a bowl and going from person to person and washing their feet so they can celebrate the Passover meal, this reminder of how God had delivered them from the angel of death in

Egypt. He comes to each one of the disciples and he knows them through and through. Yet he still loves them by serving them. He washes the feet of Matthew, the guy who had collected taxes. He washes the feet of the sons of thunder, James and John, the guys who wanted to be on his right and on his left in the kingdom, the guys who were a little full of themselves evidently. He gets to Peter and of course Peter can't just sit silently. He has to tell Jesus what Jesus should be doing, that Jesus shouldn't be washing his feet.

But also think about this. Jesus knelt down on the floor, had his hands in the water, and then washed the feet of Judas. Can you imagine that? He had told Peter, and we are going to hear it a little bit later, "if you've had a bath and had your feet washed, then your whole body is clean, though not all of you are clean," as a reminder to us that he knew what Judas was going to do that night. And there he is, the Creator of the universe, washing the feet of the guy who is going to accept the price of a slave to betray him in the hands of his enemies so that he could die. "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." That kind of puts it in a whole new perspective what love really is, right? We are to love even when love is not returned to us. Jesus loving Judas even though Judas did not return that love.

That kind of goes against the grain for us, doesn't it? Doesn't that kind of go against the grain of society? I think society is much more willing, and I think that includes you and me, we are much more willing to follow the teaching of Carrie Underwood when it comes to what we do when love isn't returned to us. You take a Louisville slugger to both headlights, right? You let people have it if they don't love you. You get back at them. You don't love them. You don't go fill the tank of that pickup. You beat it up.

So here is something new... "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Love with no expectation of return. Most of the people were keeping the commands, love God, love your neighbor, with the expectation that God would reward them for doing so. We don't obey God so God will give us heaven. We obey God because, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." This new command to love is to love in response to God loving us first, not to get anything from God or anyone else, but as a way to say thank you Jesus that you took away my sins. All the times that I only love those who love me, or I only love when I figure I'm going to get something in return... every time you've done that, Jesus has loved perfectly in your place without expectation of return. Every time you have failed to love those who don't love you, every time you have hurt those who love you, every time you have hurt those who hate you, Jesus carried it all on his back to the cross. He loved perfectly in your place. Then he took your sins and the sins of everyone else, including the sins of Judas, to the cross. He loved with no expectation of return, not even the return of joy for himself, because he had to endure the agony of the cross to pay for our sins. There was no joy when he cried out "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?" There was certainly joy in doing his Father's will, but his love was a love that was completely and absolutely unconditional. That's a pretty new command.

I don't care how many years in a row you've thought about this or studied this or focused on loving like God loved you, you haven't done it. None of us do it. We need this constant reminder to love as God loved us. We need a constant reminder to focus on the command that he gives, because that's how we respond to the love he has shown us first.

So how in the world can you and I do something that is so unnatural for us? It doesn't just come from following Jesus' example, because we can't do that. We can't do that perfectly. It comes also from the other gift that he gave to his disciples and to us on that first Maundy Thursday evening. As they were celebrating the Passover, he took the bread and said "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." He took the cup and said "This is my blood of the new covenant." Not the old covenant, the new covenant. "Which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of your sins." As Christians who commune and recognize what we are receiving (the body and blood of Christ) and remember what Christ has done for us (taken away all of our sins and loved us perfectly), and we marvel that he takes the time (hours before the beatings begin) to give this incredible gift for us to enjoy over and over and over so that we are assured our sins are forgiven... when we remember all of these things, we see this incredible love is not just something that we seek to imitate. It's something that he pours out on us in the Word and in the Sacrament. He pours it out on us and strengthens us in our faith so that we have that desire to love as he has loved us.

Then, as we grow in our faith, we stop thinking about all the other people sitting around us that don't love like Jesus loves and we start looking at how we don't love like Jesus loves. We start working on what we can control, loving God more and then loving his people more and loving everyone that he died for more. It's only going to come with our eyes on Jesus. When we put our eyes on ourselves and say "Yeah, so and so should learn to love me more," we're missing the point. When we go out in the next week and think back and say, "Yeah, so and so just hasn't started loving me the way they should," we miss the point. It's about how we are to love others. That's the only thing we can control. As I've told the confirmation class over and over this week, this is what God has told us to do.

Can I understand what Carrie Underwood wants to do with a Louisville slugger to someone that doesn't return her love? Yes. But just because I can understand it doesn't mean it's right. And to not respond in kind, to love those who hate you, love those who persecute you, pray for your enemy, feed your enemy, give your enemy something to drink, that's hard. That isn't easy. But God does not call us to do what is easy. He calls us to do what honors him because he died for us.

What pleases God is often difficult for us because our sinful nature corrupts us. That's why you and I need the constant encouragement and the constant strength that only God can provide. Otherwise, we're just going to want more pine tar to grab the bat harder. And that won't honor our God. So honor God by loving as he has loved you and find in his Sacrament the strength to do so. Amen.