

4.17.2025 Maundy Thursday

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

“Do as I have done to you”

Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The name Maundy Thursday has its origin in Jesus’ words *mandatum novum* of the Latin translation of John 13:34, “I give you a *new commandment* to love one another. Tonight we remember the two new commands (*mandatum*) Jesus gives to his followers: to love one another and to share communion with him in the “new covenant” of the Lord’s Supper. On Maundy Thursday we hear again the good news of Jesus’ love for all the world.

These two things, a life of love and the Lord’s Supper, are central to our identity as Christians. In the Lord’s Supper, Jesus took two ordinary things of daily life, bread and wine, and made them to contain his infinite love and forgiveness. In the washing of his disciples’ feet, Jesus modeled his command to love others through the servanthood of self-emptying love.

The sacrament of Holy Communion is communion with Jesus. In 1 Corinthians, Paul writes, “*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?*” (1 Cor. 10:16). The word translated as “sharing” is *koinonia*, meaning “a participation” or “a communion.” To share the bread and wine of the Eucharist is a participation, a communion, with Jesus Christ himself.

Jesus’ words, “*given for you,*” point to the communion of *koinonia* that we each share with Jesus in bread and wine. In Holy Communion, we become a new community in Christ, loving and serving each other and our neighbor. Jesus is both the giver of the feast and the feast itself. He gives us communion with one another, and he is communion with God.

No where else in this world is such community offered so freely. Excluding no one, Jesus offers to all people, rich and poor, outcast and stranger, a place at the table of his love and forgiveness. Communion with Jesus transforms us. At his table, all people are welcome, fed, and forgiven. There is no other table like this in the world.

Jesus’ words, “*given for you*” reveal his self-emptying love for you. Paul writes that Jesus took bread, gave thanks, and broke it. In breaking the bread, Jesus was also forever remembering his body broken for the sins of this world. Jesus is helping us see ourselves as his body in this world, selflessly sacrificing ourselves in love for others.

Jesus’ words, “*This cup is the new covenant in my blood,*” forever link this meal with his cross, suffering, and death. In partaking of Christ’s body broken, we become Christ’s body in this world. Jesus Christ dwells in you that you might be his body for others.

Jesus’ words, “*Do this in remembrance of me,*” command us to have communion with him

often. Unless we participate in this meal, we cannot experience the benefits of his body and blood which forgive and make us into holy people – Christ’s holy body in this world. In receiving the sacrament of the table, we grow to live sacramentally for others, sharing our lives, time, food, and love, always welcoming others into communion with him.

Yet such sacramental living and welcoming can be very hard for a church. Churches can struggle to welcome all people into communion with Jesus. I remember an experience on internship in a church attended by many prosperous families of that community. One Sunday, a man and his family came into the church and were seated by an usher. In contrast to the dark quiet suits and ties of many church members, this family was dressed casually in jeans, work boots, and sneakers. Perhaps the father and mother of this family worked on the floor of a factory in town and now found themselves seated among those who could have been their company directors and executives. Perhaps feeling uncomfortable, this family never returned to this church. To have communion with Jesus is to welcome others as he has welcomed you.

For years I taught church history and there are many stories of missionaries in colonial territories who worked to welcome both indigenous people and the colonizing elite to the same table of communion with Jesus. Imagine it: indigenous people and colonizers gathered together around the Lord’s table. This often became a point of contention among those who were the colonizers, because they did not want to welcome indigenous people into communion with themselves. Throughout the church’s history, Christians have struggled to remember that communion is not a communion “with us,” but with Jesus who offers unconditional welcome and love to all people. Jesus’ words, “*Given for you,*” are spoken to you and to your neighbor.

On Maundy Thursday, we remember that Jesus reveals the true nature of this body the church: we are Christ’s body, a servant church loving others as Jesus loves us. In washing his disciples’ feet, Jesus, humbled himself as an ordinary servant. After Peter’s protests, Jesus said to his disciples, “*I have set you an example, that you should also do as I have done to you.*” Jesus reveals our Christian identity: we are known in the humility of loving service to others. Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, carry our cross, and follow him. Jesus does what we are often unprepared to do. The world is filled with many who are unable to empty themselves in humble service to others.

While serving in Tokyo, I had the privilege of working with many gifted and selfless people. One man at a church I served was by any standard a powerful and influential member of the Japanese government, yet he regularly did many menial and humble tasks such as sweeping the road in front of the church and cleaning the restrooms. This man embodied Jesus’ love and servanthood and no task was beneath him. I think of this gentleman often because true greatness

is found in humility that glorifies God while serving one's neighbor. True greatness is selfless, humble, forgiving, and loving.

On Maundy Thursday, Jesus' words are spoken directly to us: "*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*"

As you come forward with empty hands to receive Jesus' body and blood, you become Jesus' hands in this world. In loving others as Christ loves you, you become his body in this world.

Love others as Jesus has loved you. Welcome others as Christ has welcomed you.

When others meet you, they will also meet Jesus Christ.

Jesus has no other body, no other hands, in this world but yours. Amen.