

4.2.2026 Maundy Thursday

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

“If you have love for one another”

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

The words of the Psalmist, “*How shall I repay the Lord for all the good things God has done for me?*” (Ps. 116:12), remind us that God loves and cares for each of us. On this night Jesus gives to his disciples – and to us – two good things through which Christians continue to have community with him after his passion, resurrection, and ascension: the Lord’s Supper and his commandment to love one another as he has loved us.

Today’s name, “Maundy Thursday,” comes from the Gospel of John in the Latin Bible known as the Vulgate. John 13:34 reads, “*Mandatum novum do vobis*” or “*I give you a new commandment.*” The Latin word *mandatum* is the root word for “Maundy” which means “commandment.” Maundy Thursday is about the identity of the Christian church and Jesus’ ongoing fellowship with us in the Eucharist and in our love for one another. Without Jesus’ presence in the Lord’s Supper and without loving one another in his name, we cannot be his body the church.

Partaking of the Holy Supper, we partake of the holy things of God, becoming holy people set apart to love and to serve others in Jesus’ name. Jesus’ words, “*This is my body given for you,*” remind us that in partaking of his body, we become his body the church. Yet since the Reformation, nothing has been so divisive of churches than the Lord’s Supper. As churches, we have each emphasized our different traditions and understandings, and in doing so, we each gone our different ways.

In the words of institution, Jesus says, “*Do this in remembrance of me.*” He doesn’t say, “Understand this in remembrance of me”; rather, he says, “Do this.” Churches remain caught up in the temptation to explain the mystery rather than in encouraging us to do, to live into, and to rely upon the mystery of Christ truly present in the Holy Supper. Only in doing, living, and relying upon him will we know him. Jesus’ words, “*This is my body given for you*” openly proclaim this mystery. The bread and the cup are Jesus’ body and blood “*given for you*” and “*shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.*” No other explanation is needed. He is truly present for us and all people in the Holy Supper.

In partaking of his body, we become his body the church. This cannot be overstressed. In partaking of holy things, we become his holy, living and breathing body in this world. The church’s ecumenical unity should flow from Christ’s body “*given for you,*” gathering churches in all places and languages into one body, so that amid our very real human differences the

church might witness to the unity we share in the mystery of Christ's body.

The Eucharist is Christ's body and blood given for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Fed and forgiven by Christ, we leave this sanctuary, freed to love and to forgive all people.

Tonight, we celebrate the Eucharist because it is the sacrament that prepares us to love and to serve our neighbor.

During the last supper as described in John's gospel, Jesus gets up from the table, ties a towel around himself and washes his disciples' feet. Jesus tells his disciples, "*Do you know what I have done for you?...For I have set you an example, that you should do as I have done for you.*" Peter's objection to Jesus washing his feet is that such work is the work of servants and slaves. The example Jesus sets is that no work is beneath him nor beneath his followers. To be a Christian means living a life of service for others.

Jesus goes on to give meaning to serving others, saying, "*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another.*"

Everything will depend upon whether Jesus' disciples love one another. The love of Jesus is both what gives the church its unity and what makes Christians known and identifiable in the world. Without the love of Christ, the church ceases to be the church.

Jesus makes his love the public work of the church, saying, "*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*" Jesus' love is the publicly identifiable mark of the Christian church and of his disciples. This is why Jesus' new commandment is called the "inescapable commandment" – because we cannot call ourselves Christians if we do not love and serve others.

Some might ask, "What does Jesus mean by the word "love"? It's a good question because, in English we often belittle the significance of the word love in using it for things rather than for people. Jesus' love is all about people. Jesus felt the pain, suffering, and needs of others. When they were hungry, he fed them; when they were alone, he found them; when they were sick, he healed them; when they were outcast, he welcomed them; when they crucified him, he forgave them. When they were sick with sin, he offered himself in their place, so they might know healing, forgiveness, and new life. Jesus' love is all about people.

Jesus' love means that Christians are not bystanders in the world. Christians are not to be apathetic because the word "apathy" (from the Greek *apatheia*) means to be unfeeling. Rather, Christian love feels and knows the pain of the world. What did Jesus mean by love? Look to his cross and you will see an undying love for the whole world – for you and for your enemies.

The church must never tire of preaching the love of Jesus and Christians must never tire of loving others as Jesus has loved us. At the end of our lives, Jesus will ask if we have done

everything within our power to be loving, forgiving, compassionate, and uplifting toward others in this world. Our lives stand or fall on our love for others. Jesus says, “*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*”

Jesus’ command to love changes the moral landscape of the world. Individuals and nations cannot call themselves Christian if they do not love others. His command is the “inescapable commandment” because it demands a response. It is a tragedy during Holy Week that there is war in the Middle East and some Christians do not see the contradiction of violence and war with Jesus’ command to love. We are known as his disciples only by his love.

In the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus did not seek to kill Judas, and he told Peter to put away his sword (Mt. 26:52). In the night in which he was betrayed, hatred and violence ruled the human heart, yet Jesus offers a love that overcomes and forgives all these.

On this night, Jesus shows us what true love looks like: it is a love so courageous that it gives up its life for another. It is a love stripped of all worldly power and authority, yet it is a love that has the power to change the world for good.

*How shall I repay the Lord for all the good things God has done for me?*

If you have love for others, the world will see Jesus Christ in you. Amen.