

Rev. Beth J. Costlow

Maundy Thursday

John 13:1-17; 31-35

April 1, 2021

Prepared for: Lutheran Church of Our Saviour, Greenville SC

- History: Maundy Thursday, Triduum and Paschal Triduum
  - Triduum = Two Latin words: Three + Days
    - Last supper, crucifixion, resurrection
    - Why silence? These services, although separated by days, comprise one worship experience. We leave and return mid-worship.
  - Paschal = Greek: Lamb
  - Maundy = Latin word “mandate” (English same word, pronounced differently) command
    - “Commandment Thursday” begins the three days’ worth of services that comprise our celebration of the resurrection.
- So let’s talk about the commandment. But first, let’s acknowledge that although Jesus identifies it as a commandment, he doesn’t speak it as one.
  - NRSV: I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.”
  - Greek: “I give you a new commandment, that you might love one another.”
    - And then, “Just as I have loved you, you might also love one another.”
    - Subjunctive verb = the mood expressive of doubt
      - Well-placed doubt, given humanity’s track record in obedience to God’s command
        - Very first commandment: “Don’t eat the fruit from that tree,” immediately followed by the humans eating that fruit.
- Ten Commandments: First three are about humanity’s relationship with God. The last seven are about our relationships with one another.
  - Humanity has failed on both counts since creation.
  - So Jesus’ commandment includes some doubt.
  - One commentator: Have you ever wondered whether, upon hearing Jesus’ new commandment about the way the disciples should love one another, anyone went out into the night looking for Judas, in order to share that gift of love with him?
    - Did anyone fear for Judas? Did anyone miss him, or try, even after he brought soldiers to Gethsemane, to bring Judas back and talk him out of his shame, anger, and descent into his own hell?

- I'll confess that, until I read the question from that biblical scholar.
      - And if the thought ever did cross my mind, I'm sure I'd have said that Judas got what he deserved.
- Honesty: By the time the crucifixion actually happened, none of the disciples could claim superiority over Judas.
  - Sure, Judas was the one who overtly betrayed him in turning him over to the authorities.
  - BUT none of the rest of the disciples risked themselves or their reputations by defending him
    - None of them bothered to intervene between Jesus and the crowd shouting, "Crucify!"
    - None of them even showed the minimal level of loyalty it would have taken to help him carry the cross.
    - At best? They stood silently by and watched his murder unfold.
- We aren't any better than those original disciples!
  - We have moments when we shine the light of Jesus' love brightly.
    - Small ways, often unrecognized: Holding a door for others, contributing food for the hungry
    - Bigger ways, perhaps with more thought given: Giving up a day off in order to run errands for someone else.
    - Overt ministry participation: Making a donation of food or time to our food pantry, assisting in worship
  - But we fall short as often as we succeed.
- Jesus washes the feet of his betrayer right along with those of the other disciples.
- "I give you a new commandment, that you might love one another. Just as I have loved, you, you might also love one another."
  - Sometimes we succeed. Sometimes we fail.
  - In both, we abide in the love of God.
  - "As I have loved you," this is a done deal. In Jesus, God has given us a gift of love that is inescapable.
  - Amen.