

The Mandate
John 13:1-17, 31b-35
April 2, 2015

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have 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 have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Grace, mercy, and peace from the one who taught us to love by loving us, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Tonight is Maundy Thursday. The night when our Lord instituted the holy meal, which the church now refers to as Holy Communion or The Lord's Supper. Quite often, church services on Maundy Thursday concern themselves with this holy meal, its creation, its meaning, and its blessings.

However, tonight we are going to look in another direction. Tonight, we are going to center on the mandate of Maundy Thursday. There is a similarity between the words mandate and maundy. They both have the same Latin root – mandatum. Mandatum means to mandate, to issue an order, to give a command. Maundy Thursday is the Thursday on which Christ gave his followers their marching orders.

Now, some people think that the mandate of Maundy Thursday was to carry on the Supper which was started that night. We read the accounts of what happened in that

upper room and we hear Jesus saying: *Do this in remembrance of me* (Lk 22:19). That sounds like a mandate, an order – and it is. But that’s not the command that Jesus issued that led the church into calling this night Maundy Thursday.

The command, that is the mandate from our Lord, comes in the 34th verse of tonight’s reading. Jesus tells his disciples, and us: *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.* Our mandate, our marching orders, is that we must love each other, and everyone else, as Jesus loves us.

Okay, we can understand the order, but understanding the order isn’t enough. We must also understand the depth of the order. To achieve that understanding, we must have a firm comprehension of just how much Jesus loves us – each of us – individually. So, let’s answer the question, “How much does Jesus love you?”

When God the Father first called the universe into existence, when God the Holy Spirit moved across the face of the deep, it was the second person of the Trinity, God the Son who made the world and everything in it. Jesus made the world you live in. That’s pretty personal.

But there’s something more phenomenal than that. On the sixth day of Creation, Jesus formed Adam out of the dust of the ground. Our Lord took the time to personally make Adam, not to speak him into existence like everything else, but to form him – to make him a person without duplicate, a person unique to all of time.

And that says something about you. Like Adam, you have been lovingly handcrafted by Jesus. With the psalmist you can say: *You have created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother’s womb* (Ps 139:13). Because of Jesus’ love for you, you have been fearfully and wonderfully made by the same hands that scooped out the oceans and flung the stars in the sky.

But Jesus’ love goes beyond just creating people. He also sustains people. All four Gospel writers give us the account of Jesus feeding the 5000. They tell us that Jesus had been preaching to the people. As evening approached, the disciples began to be concerned about the people, who hadn’t eaten. With only five loaves and two fish, Jesus fed the crowd.

Jesus cared about the physical welfare of the people. He cares about your physical well-being also. Jesus promises that as the flowers of the field and the birds of the air are cared for, so much more he will see to your needs. That’s a promise born in love. The same Savior, who tended to the needs of the 5000, daily tends to your needs.

Sometimes our needs aren’t physical but emotional. Sometimes we feel lost, alone, overwhelmed, scared. The account that comes to mind when talking about such a rush of negative emotions is about Peter. Peter in a boat in a storm.

At Jesus' command, Peter leaves the boat and begins to walk on the water. That's when a physical storm brings on Peter's emotional storm. Peter sees the threatening storm and fear sets in. Peter would have sunk without Jesus. But Jesus takes Peter by the hand and they walk on the raging sea back to the boat.

And this is you, too. When the storms of life begin to swell and surge, when you are feeling overwhelmed and scared, when you're sure you're lost and there's no one to help, that's when Jesus' love takes firm hold of you. With your hand in Jesus' hand, you can walk together on the stormiest of seas. And Jesus' hand is always there for you.

Another way in which Jesus has demonstrated his love for you relates very well to the story of the blind man from Bethsaida. This blind man came to Jesus while he was preaching and asked Jesus to give him sight. This poor man had been blind since birth. But when Jesus touched this man, he could see.

Like this blind man, you were born in sin and spiritually blind. You could never see the truth of God while you were in this condition. The apostle Paul writes: *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God* (2 Cor 4:4).

However, in your baptism, when the Holy Spirit brought faith into your heart, the love of Jesus touched your spiritual eyes. Jesus removed your spiritual blindness. Now you can see. You can recognize your Savior. You can see to follow him.

You were not only born spiritually blind, you were also born spiritually deaf. You could hear, but you couldn't hear the truth. Again, at your baptism, the love of Jesus touched you and healed your spiritual deafness. You can now hear for yourself the truth of God, something the spiritually dead of the world remain deaf to.

The love of Jesus also moved him to heal your congenital heart defect. You were born with a heart that suffered from the congenital disease of sin. At your birth, your physical heart was beating but your spiritual heart was dead. Until it was touched by Jesus, your spiritual heart was hard, cold, and still. But Jesus couldn't stand the thought of your condition, so he came into your heart and brought it life – eternal life.

I've saved the best for last. The greatest demonstration of Jesus' love for you came on the cross. It's on the cross that you can see just how deeply Jesus loves you. I'm going to use the words of Max Lucado to be sure you see just how great this love is.

It's important that you know that if the soldier with the mallet had hesitated, Jesus would have swung the mallet himself. He knew how; he was no stranger to driving nails. As a carpenter he knew what it took. As our Savior he knew what it meant. He knew that the purpose of the nail was to place sin where it could be hidden by his sacrifice and covered by his blood – your sin and my sin. On Calvary, the love of Jesus touched your life in the most important way possible. On the cross, the love of Jesus removed your sin from you as far as the east is from the west.

Now, do you have a good grasp on just how much Jesus loves you? Jesus loves you enough to create you and to care for both your physical and emotional needs. His love for you moved him to cure your spiritual blindness, your spiritual deafness, and to give life to your cold, dead spiritual heart. As someone once said, when Jesus was on the cross, it wasn't the nails that held him there, it was his love – for you.

It's time to return to our mandate, our marching orders on this Maundy Thursday. We live in a world of hatred, abortion, violence, war, poverty, greed, bigotry, mistrust, and other sins too numerous to list. The only love this world knows is a perverted love of self. The world is held firmly in the grip of Satan.

The world needs the love of Jesus. It's our job to take the love of Jesus to the world. We start by learning to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. Then we grow into learning to love the unsaved, the unloved, the unlovable.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”