

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

Tonight is the night we call “Maundy Thursday,” the word “Maundy” derived from the Latin word “*mandatum*” or command. In other words, it’s not optional, it’s required. So what’s our new mandate on this day? It’s quite simple really, to love one another.

Supper that night included the washing of feet, imminent betrayal with violence to come, a farewell discourse, trip to garden which included Jesus praying, the disciples sleeping. This is the night, the Last Supper, when Jesus took the bread and the wine and commanded his disciples to “do this remembrance of me,” what we call Holy Communion, and tonight we celebrate First communion for five of our young people.

Later this night Jesus will entreat his disciples to “watch with me for a little while,” when all they wanted to do was sleep. Later this night Jesus will experience loneliness, even abandonment, he will be agitated beyond belief. Jesus will be betrayed by someone he had regarded as a friend. Jesus arrested, disciples flee, then comes denial by Peter, mock trials, crucifixion, death. Certainly nothing sentimental about what happens this night and the next day.

Matthew, Mark and Luke include the meal of bread and wine which our gospel writer John leaves out, but then John includes the foot washing and focuses on “this is what it looks like when you love one another.” Acts of humble service.

When we come together Sunday after Sunday to celebrate Holy Communion and proclaim Jesus’ words to “do this in remembrance of me,” we break the bread. Breaking bread is a traditional practice, going into Jewish history.

Breaking bread is a practical action prior to sharing a meal, mentioned throughout scripture in connection with ordinary meals, and Jesus’ miracle meals, such as feeding the 5,000 elsewhere in John’s gospel. Yet this breaking the bread is an important part of the story as Matthew, Mark and Luke tell it, but it’s absent from the gospel of John, which I read a short time ago.

For Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus shared the meal with his disciples. Jesus ate the meal, ate the bread. But for John, Jesus was the Passover meal, the Passover sacrifice, the Paschal Lamb of God who is sacrificed for us. Jesus was present in the actual bread. Jesus was the bread. It was Jesus who would be betrayed and killed and shed his blood to redeem the people before God, Jesus was the Lamb of God and John wants us to understand this.

And so when we come together for the Lord’s Supper, the Last Supper, and we break the bread, it is much more than simply breaking bread that we share among the gathered community. It is breaking Jesus that he be the sacrifice for us.

We break Jesus' body, as we break our promises and commitments, our relationships and our community. Again and again. This is a pivotal point of our Maundy Thursday story, when Jesus is taken whole and consecrated to God, and then broken for our sins.

In John's gospel, something else happens. Jesus is the sacrificial figure, but John's emphasis is not on the Lord's Supper. So that when Jesus washes feet, he is offering something else. When he lowers himself to take on water bowl and towel and perform this lowly act of comfort, he is giving life to the words: "Do this in remembrance of me."

The love of Jesus, the love of God, the love of neighbor, is more than breaking bread in church. It is the emptying of ourselves in love and humble service to be filled with the spirit of God in service of our neighbors.

Jesus' message is the gospel of John is "Remember me and love one another, and this is how you do it. "Love one another" is our mandate, Jesus' command. As we break the bread, may we remember his command to love one another, and his example given us to take care of one another, and do so in remembrance of our Lord.

AMEN