

**Victory of the Lamb**  
**April 9, 2020**  
**Maunder Thursday**  
**Sermon text: John 13:1-17;34-35**  
**Preacher: Ben Sadler**

**13** It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. **2** The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. **3** Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; **4** so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. **5** 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. **6** He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" **7** Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." **8** "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." **9** "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" **10** Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." **11** For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. **12** 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. **13** "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. **14** Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. **15** I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. **16** Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. **17** Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. **34** "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. **35** By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

I went to a Christian college, so we had chapel twice a day. Although I don't remember many of them. I do have one really vivid memory of a chapel service. I came in the very back door and there were no seats left. Everyone had showed up for chapel that day, all the faculty, all the students, and even some people from the community. I asked someone next to me, "Why are so many people at chapel today?" And the person responded, "Don't you know? It is the professor's last chapel before he retires." You see this was a renown professor that was respected by generations of students. People from all over came to hear him give his last devotion. They knew that this would be his swan song. That he was going to be very deliberate and calculated with his words. He was going to sum up what he really believed and what he wanted to pass on to those who were listening. So everyone was quiet. We all leaned in with open ears and open hearts.

That's that kind of situation we have in our text from John 13. Jesus is meeting with his disciples in a special room to celebrate the Passover. And this is the last time he will teach his disciples before he dies. So every word that Jesus speaks is deliberate and calculated. He is going to boil all his teaching down to what is most important. He is going to sum up what he wants his hearers to know and do.

In fact, that's why we call this night "Maundy Thursday". "Maundy" comes from the Latin word "command". This is the night that Jesus gave his final command, his final teaching.

So let's see what Jesus believes is most essential. Let's lean in with open ears and open hearts to receive Jesus final command, his most precious teaching.

Then Jesus sums up everything he has been modeling and teaching into a short phrase, into one short command. The verse I'm about to share with you is Jesus final command, his mandate. This verse I'm about to share is the reason we call this day "Maundy Thursday". This is Jesus' mandate:

**<sup>34</sup> "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35)**

This is his great teaching, his great message to his people. This is his swan song. This is his final sermon, his final message to his people. In these two verses are thousands of sermons. These verses are pregnant with meaning. In a way, all of Jesus' teachings, in fact, all of the Bible are contained in these words. So let's just slow down and walk through each word and see if we can begin to scratch at their significance.

### **A new command...**

There are two Greek words for "new"

- **"Neos"- original, brand new, something that hasn't been here before.**
- **"Kainos"- distinct, unique, improvement, something taken to the next level.**

John says that Jesus used the word "Kainos". Jesus was given a unique command, an improved command, a command that takes us to a new level.

It was Moses who gave the old command. The old command was connected to an old story for a small group of people for a limited amount of time. And this old command and with the old story was remembered with an old meal.

What was the old story? The old story was that 3400 years ago, the Lord used Moses to rescue God's people out of Egyptians slavery. They had been enslaved for about 400 years. God rescued the nation of Israel from slavery so that they could be his special representatives to the world. And he gave them special commands, which we call the 10 commandments.

They were to remember God's great rescue by participating in the Passover meal every year at the beginning of the year. That meal reminded them of how God passed over the children of Israel because of the blood of a lamb, but God punished the Egyptians for their wickedness and hardheartedness.

That was the old command connected to the old story with the old meal.

Jesus was giving a new command, connected to a new story, that is remembered with a new meal.

The new command is **"Love one another."** That is why he washed their feet. That is what he was trying to teach them and show them. This single command: love one another. Moses gave 10 commands. In fact, someone counted all the commands that Moses gave in the Old Testament and there are over 613

commands. But Jesus is giving something new and improved. He is taking the old story to the next level. He is giving us one command: "Love one another."

That new command is connected to a new story. **As I have loved you, so you must love one another.** The Lord used Moses to rescue the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. This was wonderful. But it wasn't the full plan. God wanted to do something even greater. He wanted to do something even better. God used Jesus, a descendant of the Israelites, to rescue, not just his people, the Israelites, but to rescue all of humanity from sin and death and make all things new. The new story is that Jesus was about to be swallowed up by death and hell itself for us in our place and then come out on the other side alive and victorious over all that enslaves us.

Jesus loved us by bringing us out of the slavery of sin and death so that one day we can experience the Promised Land of his renewed world with our renewed, resurrected bodies.

This new command is connected to a new story and is commemorated in a new meal. You see, it was on this night that Jesus took the bread and wine that was eaten at the Passover and he transformed the old meal into something new, a new meal that was connected to a new story.

Jesus said, **"This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."**... **"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."** (Luke 22:19-20)

Although we are unable to take this supper together tonight, soon we will. How I long for that day. Because everything that Jesus wants to teach us is summed up in this evening.

**A new command  
connected to a new story  
remembered in a new meal.**

Now, when we hear this new command flowing from the new story remembered in this new meal, when we let this become our new identity, then we start becoming new people. We are set free. We set free from something even worse than slavery. We are freed from guilt and shame and the fear of death. And so, with the Holy Spirit's help we can begin to do what Jesus tells us to do "to love one another."

But what does that look like? I know there have been people over the years that have literally washed each other's feet on Maundy Thursday. I guess we could do that. I could ask you guys to go get some water and a towel and take off your socks and start washing each other's feet. But I think that misses the point. Jesus was applying his command, "Love one another" to his first century context.

We live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Midwest, not in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Middle East. It was common for servants to wash feet in their day. When the Apostle Paul reflected on Jesus taking the place of a servant, becoming nothing, and becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross, he made this application.

So what might this look like today? Well, what are the ways that you could love each other and serve each other. Maybe it is just stopping and being present and listening with no technology to get in your way. Maybe it is being first to clean the table after dinner. Maybe it is helping a child with homework.

Here's the good news. This applies to every area of life. Are you quarantined in your home? Love the people in your home. Do you feel paralyzed or anxious? Serve somebody in love. This is a way to break free from the fear and anxiety. Go help someone.

And what happens when we do this? Jesus says, <sup>35</sup> **By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:35)** This is how the world will know that we are followers of Jesus. Not primarily by what we believe. Not, first of all, by what we teach. The world will know that we are true followers of Jesus if we love one another.

This is what the world is looking for right now. In many ways this virus has brought out the worst in us. There are people hoarding supplies. There are others who are scamming the vulnerable. There is a rise in domestic abuse and mental health issues.

So people are hungry for something good. They are hungry for love. And many people are trying to do something good in the midst of this crisis. As followers of Jesus, we have a leader who gave us very clear direction. He said, “as I have loved you, love one another.”

I pray that you listen in. I pray that you hear these words and put them into practice. I pray they give you meaning, purpose and direction. I pray that they inform every area of your life.

They certainly had an impact on John, who wrote these words. According to an ancient and reliable tradition, John was the only Apostle died at an old age of natural causes. All the other followers in Jesus’ inner circle, his 12 disciples, died a martyr’s death. They were executed testifying that they saw Jesus resurrected.

But not John. He continued preaching even into his old age. In fact, the story is told that when John got very old, he would be carried before the congregation to preach. And his whole sermon would consist of one phase, “Little children, love one another.” After serving Jesus for all these years, like a teacher giving his last chapel devotion, he boiled everything down to this simple message, “Little children, love one another.” This is the final and most important message that you can use to direct you whole life, As Jesus has loved us, let us love one another.” Amen.