

April 9, 2020.

Hello Again, Apostles Friends.

Today is Maundy Thursday. “Maundy” is from the Latin “Mandatum,” meaning “commandment.” The day before Good Friday is also known as Holy Thursday in many Christian traditions. Regardless of what we call it, Maundy Thursday is very important for two reasons, a commandment and a promise, and we need both during times of trial like these.

The commandment is one of the last instructions Jesus gave his disciples on the night he was betrayed, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” (John 13:34 NRSV) You might be thinking, “Love, yes. That’s very nice, thanks.” Well, think a little harder. Jesus has just dismissed Judas with, “Do quickly what you are going to do.” Jesus knows what’s in store for him, and he knows how horrible it’s going to be. Jesus knows this is his last chance to teach his disciples, his last chance to make sure they understand what he expects of them after he’s gone. The point he decides to foot stomp is love. I am going. You’ll need to take care of each other. Love one another. I am reminded of those “Billboards from God” that were popular a few years ago. Remember those? My favorite was, “That love your neighbor thing – I meant that. God.”

Jesus underscored this message of taking care of each other with action when he washed the feet of his disciples. The practice of washing feet comes also from John 13, “Jesus . . . got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of his disciples . . . After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So, if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet.’” (verses 4, 5, 12, 13, 14)

Some churches incorporate this practice into Maundy Thursday services. Twelve members of the congregation are chosen beforehand, and at the given time they come to the front of the church and sit in chairs that have been provided for them. Traditionally the members were always men because they represented the 12 disciples. Thankfully, this practice has been recently expanded to include women as we realize the members represent all God’s people, not just the 12 named disciples. The priest or pastor then washes and dries the members’ feet. I had the chance to participate in this ritual at a previous church, and it was quite moving. The practice brings to life the Christian ideal of the servant leader. We realize that we are all sometimes servants, and we are all sometimes leaders, and it all works together as long as we follow the commandment, “As I have loved you, you should also love one another.” I’m so thankful for the health care workers, essential service workers, church and family

members, and countless others who are living this commandment in the teeth of this pandemic.

The promise Jesus gave us is in the sacrament of communion. Jesus promised that, if we remember him in the breaking of bread and the taking of wine, he would send the Holy Spirit to us to make visible the grace, forgiveness, and presence of God. In other words, he promised to always be with us in a very real way when we observe this sacrament. In our present time of trial we worry that social distancing can become psychological isolation, which can become spiritual abandonment. Jesus wants us to know that he is with us, really present for us, when we remember him in the breaking of bread and taking of the cup.

Last year I had the privilege of representing Church of the Apostles in a Living Last Supper presentation at our combined Maundy Thursday service at Trinity UCC, Waynesboro. I portrayed the disciple, Thaddeus. The program had each disciple arriving alone, thinking about what importance, if any, the evening might hold. The congregation could hear our “thoughts” because our pre-recorded monologues were played through Trinity’s sound system as we walked from the back of the sanctuary to the table set for us in the front. The program had a very powerful ending that I won’t describe here because I don’t want to spoil it. You see, Trinity recorded last year’s Maundy Thursday service and posted it to their website (www.tuccwboro.com) so it could serve as both church’s service for this year, too. I hope you have the chance to check it out.

Jesus, on the night you were betrayed, the night before you died for us, you could have been excused for being preoccupied with your fate. Instead, you focused on us by providing one last lesson in love and making one steadfast promise in the sacrament of communion. We commemorate these gifts on this Maundy Thursday, and we recognize their sustaining power in our hour of need. Amen.

Take care,

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