

## A NEW COMMANDMENT

Maundy Thursday Sermon

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

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Scripture: John 13:34

Good evening church! I'm so thankful that we can come together on this Maundy Thursday and celebrate what God has for us in understanding His Word and in partaking of this memorial of His Son. I'm excited for us to be together, excited that we had this time of worship to be able to focus on Him for as we worship, God inhabits the praises of His people. He is here with us, and before we go further, let's take a few moments and pray together, especially, for this season, what's going on in our world, and for this service as well.

Shall we pray?

Almighty God, we come to You as Creator God, and one who sustains His creation. We come to the One who is a loving God and who loves each one of us. We come to a God who is omnipotent, who knows all things, and so is able to know all things that are going on in our hearts and in our lives. Lord, we come to the One who is omnipresent, who is aware of the larger picture and knows things beyond what we can see or understand. We come to You, Triune God, and we ask that You would look with compassion on this world that You have created as we try to battle with this virus that is taking so many lives and causing so much harm. Lord, we ask that You would put an end to it, that You would eradicate it from our midst. We also pray that You would bring healing to those who are infected by it, or even those affected by it – Lord that You would touch them. We pray that You would reach into isolation wards and ICUs and places where people are quarantined with Your Spirit and bring solace and comfort and healing. We also pray for those taking care of them – the medical staff, doctors, nurses, interns, care-givers who are working so tirelessly. We see pictures of them sleeping on corridors trying to get back their energy. And we pray that they would rise on wings like eagles, that they would be nourished and nurtured by Your Spirit, Lord, during this time. Lord, we now ask that You would be with us as we look into Your Word and partake of this memorial, that these would be holy moments completely consecrated by You and sanctified and made holy by Your presence alone. in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

John 13:34

*Jesus says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."*

As we begin to look at Maundy Thursday and its place in the holy week, we must look at the whole body of scripture that informs us of the turn of events on that night that Jesus was betrayed. Looking through the harmony of gospels, we can put together various vignettes through the eyes of the gospel writers – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Let's see how this whole scene comes together.

First, we have the Passover meal. It needs to be prepared, and so Jesus, like He sent His disciples to get the donkey and the foal when He came into Jerusalem, now sends Peter and John, "Go into the village and you will see a man carrying a pitcher. Follow him into his house and then tell him that the teacher has a need of a place to celebrate the Passover meal, and he will show you a room. Take that room and prepare." And that's exactly what

happened. They went and they found this man. They told him what Jesus had said and he pointed to an upper room, and he said, “You can use that room to have the Passover meal.”

Meanwhile, Judas is on another mission. He is off to see the scribes and the Pharisees, and they are the ones who are now saying, “We’ve got to kill Jesus. Somehow, we’ve got to get rid of Him.” And Judas says, “I can betray Him. I can deliver Him to you.” They agree and even say they will pay him some money. Then Judas leaves their presence.

Then John tells us that when evening came, they were all gathered together in this upper room. When they were seated, Jesus got up, laid aside His outer garments, took a basin of water and a towel. Then He began to wash the disciples’ feet, one by one, until He came to Peter, who remonstrated and said, “Are You going to wash my feet?” and Jesus replied, “Yes, I am.” And Peter said, “No, You can’t wash my feet.” And Jesus said, “Peter, if I don’t wash your feet, you can’t have any part in me.” And Peter, being Peter, said, “Then was every part of me – my head, my body, everything.” And Jesus said, (I think if it weren’t for it being such a somber moment, it could have been a tongue and cheek comment) “Anybody who has had a bath doesn’t need to be washed completely. He only needs his feet to be washed.” Then Jesus says to all of them, “One of you will betray Me,” and immediately, they all begin to look at each other, asking, “Is it I?” Then Jesus says, “Whoever dips his hand into the bowl with me is that one.” Other scriptures tell us that He looked at Judas, and soon after that, Judas left to do what he had said he would do.

Then of course, is the instituting of the Lord’s Supper, of the Holy Eucharist, or Holy Communion, as we have come to call it, of which we will partake of in a few moments. But, how can we flesh out this meal? How can we add context to this Holy Sacrament? Allow me to lay some thoughts before you. I’m confident that, as you begin to think about them, somehow the Holy Spirit is going to bring one thought to you that will be kind of an ‘Aha’ moment as you partake of the sacrament in your own homes. If I were to put this meal in the very center, and look at it through the eyes of the gospel accounts, five views present themselves to me, or five significant aspects or five focuses that come together.

### **1. Historical Significance**

There is a historical significance to this meal. It commemorates the Passover meal. Jesus was standing on the cusp of history, looking back to an event that freed the children of Israel from Pharaoh and Egypt, and the bondage they were in. The Israelites killed the lamb, put the blood on the doorposts and the lintel of their houses so that the angel of death would pass over. Then looking forward to His own death and the sacrifice that He was going to give, not only to save the children of Israel, as the Passover meal symbolized, but as a sacrifice for the whole world so that the angel of death would pass over each one who believed in what He was going to do, and what He did as we now see it.

Remember, John the Baptist who looked at Jesus and said, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”

So, there’s an aspect of history that is involved.

### **2. Sociological Significance**

It was a community festival observed in homes, celebrating and remembering the exodus of the Jews from Egypt, and the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. Unleavened, because they didn’t have time for the bread to rise as they were, saying expected to be prepared to leave at

a moment's notice. Then of course, was the teaching – when Jesus washed the disciples' feet. It's all about servant leadership; it's about leading in humility, about being connected to one another. So, we see this sociological significance as well.

### **3. Relational Significance**

It was celebrated with family and dear ones who were visiting at that time. The accent was to remember the story, to remember what God did, remember the exodus from Egypt and retell the story as it is found in the Haggadah, which divided the night into fifteen different segments. These segments paralleled actually the fifteen steps of the temple on which the Levites stood when the temple was there, or even the fifteen psalms that they memorized (Psalm 120 to Psalm 134). Children were expected to ask questions and were rewarded for it. So, there was a very relational significance to this whole meal.

### **4. Spiritual Significance**

On the one hand, while celebrating the Passover, Jesus was also instituting the Last Supper with the disciples, which would become for us the Holy Eucharist or Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper for the church, because the Bible tells us: *As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then He broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "Take, eat, for this is My body." And He took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, "This is My blood, which confirms the covenant between God and His people. It is poured out as a sacrifice for many."*

They may not have understood this spiritual significance at that time, but, as I mentioned earlier, Jesus stood at the cusp of history – on one hand, looking back to history, and on the other hand, looking forward to the future knowing that this was going to be a memorial that would constantly remind His church of what He had done, and the significance of His death, burial and resurrection.

### **5. Emotional Significance**

There's an emotional component as well. As we saw, Jesus was also in the midst of one who would betray Him. Every time I think about that, I think how difficult that meal was for Jesus, how difficult it was to wash his feet. And yet, He did it. It must have been an emotional moment for Him. And I think, as we come together and celebrate this Maundy Thursday, that emotional component should be with us as well.

As we look at all these significant aspects of this meal, what does it teach us? What can we distill from it? Let me give you four points:

- a) It teaches us that our faith is rooted and anchored in history; that ours is a historical faith. It is the faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And that we are, maybe, Gentiles who are grafted into the new Israel.
- b) It also teaches us that our faith is a relational faith, that it is lived out in community and never in isolation. As the writer of Hebrews says: *Do not forsake that gathering together of the saints.* We come together in community and we recognize because God's Spirit is drawing us together.

- c) We also learn that the outcome of our faith must lead to acts of service to one another. James says, *“Show me your faith without works and I will show you a dead faith.”*
- d) It also shows us that we are fallible, that however closely we may walk with our Master, we can and sometimes do follow our own fleshly agendas. This also highlights for us why 1 John 1:9 has such meaning: *If we confess our sins, that He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Let’s pull this even further. Let’s funnel this down to one central point that we ought to be looking at – that Jesus also says something else that has given this day its name: Maundy Thursday. The Latin word ‘mandatum’ means command or commandment. Jesus instituted a new commandment. He said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you,” and it is repeated almost thirty times in the New Testament – that you love one another as I have loved you.

So, when we think about loving one another, we need to first turn back and see, Jesus says, “Love one another as I have loved you.” And how has He loved you and me? He has loved us with abandon. He has loved us even when we were unlovable. The Bible says that even while we were still sinners, Christ Jesus died for us. He loves us beloved, when we are unloved. And He says, “Just as I have loved you, love one another.”

So, we must ask this question on this Maundy Thursday: Who is it that I need to love? Who is it that I have stopped loving? Who is the person who has hurt me? Who is the person who has derided me or said something about me, spread rumors about me, and I have said that I am not going to connect with them? And your love has turned indifference.

That’s an ‘ouch’ place, isn’t it? But we are commanded to look for people whom we really don’t like and love them. I looked at the Greek word that Jesus used, and it’s the Greek word ‘agape’. The reason I bring this here is, that in understanding that it is that kind of love, actually will make it easier for us to love. Why? Because agape is a non-causal love. It is a love that just loves; it is not a love that responds to love. It’s not a love that responds to kindness. It is not a love that responds to people who do good things to us. It’s a love that says, “It doesn’t matter what you have done or not done – I’m going to love you.” It’s a non-causal love.

So, for a moment, we need to just put away all the things that people have done to us, and then look up to Jesus and say, “Lord, just as You have loved me, I want to love my brothers and sisters around me.” Then beloved, as we come to this table and partake of the Lord’s Supper, invite the Holy Spirit, because in and of ourselves, it is impossible to love in this particular situation. Invite the Holy Spirit to move in your heart and mind to bring to mind those people who we are indifferent to and show us ways and means to love them.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another even as I have loved you.

1 Corinthians 11:23-29

*For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed, took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as*

*often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.*

*Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. but a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the wine. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.*

Dearly beloved, the body of the Lord broken and the blood of our Lord shed for each one of us.

Would you pray with me?

Almighty God, we ask and invite Your Holy presence here and in each one of our homes. As we partake of this memorial, bless this bread and juice that it would be as reminders of the brokenness of Your Son and the precious blood that He shed on Calvary – reminders too, that because of His death, the veil was rent, and we have access into Your presence. Remind us too that there is no sin that is so dark and stained that the precious blood of Jesus cannot cleanse. Help us to come with faith, help us as we come inviting Your Holy Spirit to help us love one another. Put within us the capacity to love in beautiful, wonderful, even miraculous ways that we may love as You have loved us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.