



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

Well, today is Maundy Thursday. Not surprising that our Gospel reading tonight is a reading from John, of the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. Maundy, comes from the Latin word "mandatum", which means command or mandate. And so the second section of the reading is the new commandment from Jesus that says, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

Do take note good friends in Christ, that this is not a suggestion by Jesus. But rather it is a commandment. It is not just a command that says love your mommy and daddy in the same way Jesus loves you. It says, love one another. And love them like Jesus loved us. Well, those are big words, and a tall order to fill.

Tonight is when we hear that Jesus was servant to his disciples. He washed their feet. Dirty, stinky, old feet and He washed them. And I would guess that He washed those feet of the disciples, with tender loving care. His love was sacrificial and self-giving. And not only does Jesus wash their feet, but he loves these disciples so much that he willingly gives up his life for them. He died on the cross to secure for them and for us, forgiveness, abundant and

eternal life. Now, that folks is true love: to lay down ones life for another. What greater love could there be? And why does Jesus give us such a mandate, such a command?

Obviously, Jesus knows our human condition. He understands that a part of every one of us rebels against His idea of pure unconditional love. Despite the fact that Jesus shows us total love, underserved and unconditional, He knows that we cannot perfectly model this example. Most of us will not go to the cross of death for humanity. In fact none of us could do that even if we wanted too. Jesus set the bar very high. His love for us is immeasurable, yet He asks us to love one another by His example.

As we try to live by this command and emulate Jesus, I for one, tell myself that loving others is great, at least up to a point.

Our human condition has us drawing a line in the sand, if you will. How far are we going to go to love one another? How far must we go to be a servant to one another? Seems to me that most of us want to be selective about who and how much we love. We are happy to love in this selective way. We are comfortable with love that does not make us uncomfortable. But this is not the love that Jesus is talking about here. He is talking exactly about the sort of love that makes us uncomfortable. That love is the special love Jesus showed us as he went to the cross. It is sacrificial and self-giving. A love that risked pain and suffering even to the point of death on a cross, for us. It is an unconditional love. One that does not think of self, but rather sacrifices self for our neighbor.

Jesus' love was genuine, honest, caring and compassionate. It was not controlled by an on/off switch, but rather was sustaining. It was a love that was willing, as well as sacrificial. It is a love that we can aspire too, but one that I think you will admit, we fall short of day in and day out. It is a love that is in many ways incomprehensible. We find it hard to wrap our hearts and certainly our heads around it. But folks, that is the way God's love is toward us. He loves all his children with the same veracity that took Jesus to the cross.

Do I think it is easier to be selfish, to ignore those that need our love? You bet. That is why Jesus commands his followers to love one another with the same love He has for us. The Apostle John says in 1 John 4:19, "We love him because he first loved us." You see, to have love for one another we must first accept and acknowledge the love of God in Christ. When we have a relationship with

God, the more the love of Jesus fills our lives, the more we will be able to show that same love to others.

Love does not happen in a vacuum. It is something that gets passed from one person to another. Think about how we love the children we raise. They accept our love and then give it right back to us. Same thing here, the love we receive from Jesus comes full circle to us. We can love others by His great example.

Someone once said that love is an aerobic exercise. The output must be matched by our intake. What I mean is that like running or doing any exercise, taking in oxygen is required. More than just walking or cooking dinner for sure. Well, love requires God's presence. There is a need, the oxygen for love is reading God's word, prayer, His Holy Spirit. And when we have these things in our backpack, we will go on an aerobic binge of loving by God's strength and ability. We will love because He has first loved us.

What a wonderful week to immerse ourselves in God's Word. And tonight we come to the table, the Lord's Table to let Him enter our lives and empower us to love, serve and work together. The Eucharist is a communal event as we together share the body and blood of Jesus, God's family meal. Together we can get rid of everything that is not love. God will show us how to rid our lives of things that are not in line with His command to love, like selfishness, greed, uncaring, impatience, unforgiveness and replace them with the true fruits of the spirit: "joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." And the greatest of these is love.

A story I read this week about a man who had a huge boulder in his front yard. He grew tired of this big, unattractive stone in the center of his lawn, so he decided to turn it into an object of art. He went to work on it with hammer and chisel, and chipped away at the huge boulder until the ugly stone became a beautiful running deer. When he finished, it was gorgeous, breath-taking.

A neighbor asked, "How did you ever carve such a marvelous likeness of a deer?"

The man answered, "I just chipped away everything that did not look like a deer!"

Maybe, just maybe we need to do the same: chip away everything that does not look like God's love. If you have stuff in your life that does not show

compassion, empathy, mercy, chip it away. If there is prejudice or envy in your heart, get rid of it. God is good at everything, so I can see Him with a chisel in his hand and I bet He will be a great chipper for us as well.

In a few minutes we will sing the hymn, "Where Charity and Love Prevail". The first verse ends by telling us that we are "brought here together by Christ's love, by love we thus are bound." It is by the love of God that we gather here this night. We are Christians because of Jesus' love for us. In fact, remember that old hymn, they will know that we are Christians by our love. How true it is.

And tonight as we walk every closer to the cross, I hope that you will realize that we should not take this command to love one another lightly. Jesus did not love us "lightly" or on a whim. We thank God that Jesus does not love us like we love others. His love for us models unconditional love and sacrificial love. My hope is that we will all strive to love as Christ has loved us. **AMEN**