

2019 – April 18 – Maundy Thursday  
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I'm so thankful to be with all of you tonight, sharing in this pivotal point in Holy Week. As of a few hours ago, I was across the country at my project site for work. I was 100% convinced that I wasn't going to make it back in time for this, but had an absolute God moment with a compassionate Uber driver and some miracle worker TSA agents that got me here just in time.

I'm sure all of us came into Holy Week with their own version of life chaos, but here we are, together as a family. We've made our way to the holiest days of the year. Each year as we approach this day, Maundy Thursday, I'm reminded of a strange conversation that I had in high school. As many of us know, I grew up a pretty religious youth. I was active here at the Cathedral, in our diocesan programs, and also went to a Catholic high school. For some reason though, very few of my friends outside of the Cathedral participated in services on this Thursday in Holy Week. All of my friends were dedicated to Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and of course Easter, but Thursday always seemed to get left out. I'll never forget one day in high school, turning down an after school club activity and citing my reasons for not being able to attend as "sorry I can't make it, I have Maundy Thursday services at church." I remember the strange looks, then the question came. "Maundy Thursday? Are you trying to say Monday Thursday? What are you talking about?"

Maundy Thursday, the strange, somewhat uncomfortable service that happens once every year. We all know the story played out in scripture, we all know for the most part what is going to happen in the service, we all know what Good Friday events this service is leading up to; but do we know why we pause during this week to deliberately mark these events? Maybe we should even be asking, why do we recall these events in such an interactive worship? Why do we have a special service just for these events?

There is something that I really love about this service, it's one of the few services in our prayer book that doesn't really follow the norm. Whether we are sitting at long tables sharing a meal over here in Founders, or breaking out bowls and pitchers on the floor of the Nave, this is not your normal liturgy. This liturgy is meant to awaken your heart, mind, and senses...something different is happening here. This is not what I know. This is not what I am used to. Something is changing.

I would imagine that the disciples felt a similar sense of change as well. Not only during the scene that we just heard in the Gospel, but in their daily life and interactions with their friend Jesus. Nothing about Jesus' life on earth was conventional. He didn't live his life in a way that was expected or acceptable, he didn't follow the rules or societal norms. Jesus' life on earth was countercultural. Jesus welcomed in those that society had deemed not good enough; the children, the sex workers, the sick, the homeless, the corrupt. Even in today's society, where we are self purportedly open, accepting, and welcoming, we have a hard time spending time or caring for those that are different than we are. Reaching out and welcoming, loving, someone that doesn't quite fit our idea of the mold isn't always socially acceptable. If being compassionate and reaching beyond our comfort zones is challenging now, can you imagine how strange it must have seemed in society 2000+ years ago when Jesus was walking earth?

Keeping that in mind, let's go back to the scene from tonight's Gospel. We find that the disciples are gathered together for a meal, not too dissimilar to what we're doing here tonight. It likely wasn't too out of the ordinary for the disciples to gather for meals like these, given that they spent their lives together. Even though they were likely gathered for the Passover meal on this night, for the most part, the disciples thought they knew what was coming. That is until their Lord and master got down on the ground and starting lavishing love on them in the footwashing that we read about in the Gospel. I don't know about you, but I'd imagine that there was quite a bit of shock in that room, we can see some of

that in Peter's reaction. Jesus' actions with the disciples that night were tangible representations of his love for humanity. After washing their feet, Jesus addresses his friends:

"I give you a new commandment, that you should love one another. Just as I have loved, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Jesus modeled that love in his interactions, not only with his trusted beloved disciples, but with all he encountered. Then he turned around and gave us this new commandment. Love each other. That's it, the task Jesus leaves us with.

Jesus didn't give us just a suggestion though, a "hey it might be nice if you loved each other after I'm gone, just a thought, you know, if it's easy or convenient." No, Jesus gives us a commandment. You should love one another. Period. This mandate is the very reason we refer to this day as MAUNDY Thursday. Not Monday Thursday. Maundy, mandatum, commandment. Love one another. Not a maybe, not a suggestion.

Are we actually following through with it though? Are you? Am I? Are our daily interactions fueled by love? Do we treat those that are different that we are with this love? What about people that we disagree with? People here in our own congregation? People out in the world?

These questions struck me this afternoon during my interaction with my Uber driver. This poor man. I came quite literally sprinting at his car, super stressed, probably not at my friendliest. Definitely not chatty or pleasant. As he confirmed that I was going to the airport, I probably made a sarcastic remark about it being pointless because I definitely wasn't going to make it. I sat in the backseat being, let's be honest, super grouchy. My inner monologue involved questioning why I felt the need to schedule myself so tightly. Why didn't I ask work if I could miss today's meetings and fly back earlier? Why didn't I ask if someone else could preach tonight? Ugh, you're so stupid Alexandra. Then I see my uber driver smiling at me in the rearview mirror, "excuse me miss, would you mind if I played some music?" Whatever. 6 seconds in, and I couldn't help but laugh. Oceans. That's right, the youth group favorite worship song. I listened a little longer. Yep, Christian radio. Okay, point God. I asked him if this was his normal radio choice. It was, he's a pastor. He asked me why I was so stressed and when I told him about my scheduling fail, about how I had tried to stay for my whole important work meeting but how getting back church was also super important to me, he beams at me in the mirror, "Don't worry, we've totally got this!" This guy had absolutely no logical reason to be kind to me (or to pull practical miracles getting me to the airport minutes before my plane took off). I was not outwardly deserving of his love, but that didn't stop him. This is such a tiny example, but what a huge difference it made in my day. What sort of impact could we have if we approached all of our interactions, both tiny like my experience today, and monumental? How could we change our environment from one of hostility to one of understanding?

The night that Jesus shared a meal with his disciples is the same night that one of his own friends turned him over to death. Talk about an environment of hostility. Jesus knew this was coming, he knew of his betrayer's intentions and of his fate. Instead of gathering his friends with a rally cry, encouraging them to fight back against this injustice, to avenge his impending death, to arm themselves for war...he told them to love. Jesus' last night on earth was counter culturally earth shattering. He showed us in the biggest way that no matter what is in front of us, even in this case if your friend has turned you over to death, the answer is always to love. How much different would our world look if we took on our own moments of defeat, of betrayal, of hurt, of pain and approached them not with a fight, not with resistance, but with love?

This year, Holy Week and our Jewish siblings' Passover observance overlap. Tomorrow night I'll participate in our family's Seder dinner. Since I'm an only child, I'm perpetually stuck in the youngest child role, the person that gets to ask the four questions at the start of the meal. This means that tomorrow I'll be asking my family "Why is tonight different from all other nights?" While tomorrow we'll

be reflecting on the story from Exodus, part of which we heard in the first reading, tonight I'd like for all of us to think about why this night is so different and important for us.

What makes tonight so different from all other nights? Tonight is the night that Jesus shows us just exactly how we're supposed to live our lives together; with grace, with compassion, with understanding, with love. Tonight is our official invitation straight from Jesus to be countercultural too. To get outside our comfortable box and extend our hand to the world in love.

"I give you a new commandment, that you should love one another. Just as I have loved, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."