

Maundy Thursday

Thursday 14th April 2022 – written by Bishop Donald Kirk

‘Maundy’ is one of those odd words in the English language and one which we don’t come across elsewhere. We know it as the name for this day, but what does it mean? It comes from the Latin word ‘mandatum’ from which we also get the English word ‘mandate’. It speaks of the mandate or commandment that Jesus gave his disciples on this day.

There are three things that Jesus said and did at the Last Supper which all relate to this new commandment:

1. **Jesus washed their feet.** This was a simple ritual about cleanliness, not dragging the dust of the road into the house, but also about humility and welcome. This action would ordinarily have been performed on behalf of the host by a servant. Jesus, however, chooses to do this lowly task himself. We see the Lord of the universe, the great Teacher these disciples have followed to here, once again turning the social norms and expectations of the day upside down. Peter’s initial objection to Jesus washing his feet indicates this.

Jesus offers us the example of humility and the gift of welcome and invites us to do likewise. We as Christian people are called to act with this kind of humility in welcoming one another, and all people, into the fellowship of the Church. The traditional Latin hymn ‘*Ubi caritas*’ expresses this. Richard Connolly’s translation says:

*Where there is charity and love,
there the God of love abides.*

2. **Jesus institutes the Eucharist.** The principle celebration of the Christian Community when we meet together is the Eucharist. This is because Jesus, at the Last Supper, gave us this meal as a way of remembering and worshipping. Paul writing to the Corinthians makes that clear when he says: “*Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that 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.’*” [1 Corinthians 23-25]

This ‘remembering’ is particular. It is not like sharing a story with an old friend about something you once did years ago and having a vague fond recollection of the event leaving it in the past. This is a remembering that causes the reality of that event to be known and felt in the present moment. By sharing in the bread and wine we are present with Jesus and he with us. We participate in his act of Salvation as we faithfully remember. Jesus command, “*Do this in remembrance of me*”, is to help us share and remember together all that he did for us. Charles Wesley’s Hymn:

*Jesus, we thus obey
your last and kindest word;
here, in your own appointed way,
we come to meet you, Lord.*

3. **Jesus gave the command to love.** It sounds simple enough but never is in reality. Human beings have always found ways to qualify, limit or avoid loving certain people. Yet Jesus new commandment is not qualified or limited in any way, nor can it be avoided if we seek to be true to him. He said: *“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] By linking the disciples love to his love he made it clear that this included everyone because his whole ministry had included everyone. It didn't matter whether they were tax collectors, prostitutes, thieves, or religious leaders – all were included in God's love.

The word in the original Greek text of John's Gospel translated as 'love' is *ago-parté* which is 'divine love' or 'selfless care' for the other with a sense of insistent purpose. Jesus is demanding that they love this way; that we love this way! This is our calling as Christian people. Frederick Kaan in verse 3 of his hymn *Now let us from this table rise* expressed it this way:

*To fill each human house with love,
it is the sacrament of care;
the work that Christ began to do
we humbly pledge ourselves to share.*

The mandate or commandment that Jesus gives us today is:

Humility and welcome,
Particular remembering, and
Loving selfless care.

As we take the time to recall all that Jesus has done in Salvation for all humanity over this weekend, Maundy Thursday reminds us:

- to come to these celebrations in humility, offering the same welcome that Jesus gives to us to all,
- to taking the time to remember with particularity the Eucharist is his lifegiving gift, and,
- to go from these celebrations to be the people who show that we are Christians by the loving, selfless care we offer to all.