

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another... (John 13:34)*

Holy Week, or the week of Christ's Passion, is an important week for Christians who follow the liturgical year. During this week, we commemorate the final week of the life of Christ on earth before his death. We have opportunities for worship, prayer, silence, and fellowship. Easter and Good Friday are well known days during this week. Maundy Thursday, though, is something less known and appreciated.

Normally on Maundy Thursday, we hear the reading, from whichever Gospel we are in that year, of Jesus instituting the new covenant of forgiveness in his body and blood in the Sacrament. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all give an account of this Supper and Jesus' words of institution. Even Paul does in 1 Corinthians. Not John. John is unusual. And maybe nothing is more unusual to our ears than Jesus – the Son of God – kneeling down, with a towel hanging from his waist, washing Peter's feet.

This reading in John 13–17 recounts many of the words Jesus spoke before, during, and after the Passover meal Jesus and his disciples were gathered to celebrate. At one point during the meal, Jesus grabbed a towel, got down on his knees, and began washing the feet of Peter and the disciples. Feet are generally not sanitary even today, but in the ancient world, feet were disgusting. Most people in the first century wore some type of sandals and walked everywhere. This would have allowed anything and everything to come into contact with their feet. This is, in part, why Peter is so reluctant – *opposed*, even – to Jesus washing his feet. But, wash them he did. *What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand...If I do not wash you, you have no share with me* (John 13:7, 8). Jesus leaves no room for anything else. It's his way or the highway. So, how does Peter respond? *Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!* (13:9). What a confession of faith! If Jesus needs to wash me, Peter is saying, than he needs to wash all of me!

You cannot be a Christian without the new birth of water and the Spirit that comes from faith in Jesus. This is the basis of our faith – Jesus' work for us, in which he shows us his love by dying for us, forgiving our sins, and giving us everlasting life. But, in this new life of forgiveness, Jesus also gives us work to do: *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another* (John 13:34–35). This command – *mandatum* in Latin – is where we get the 'Maundy' of Maundy Thursday. So, two things are true for this special day. We commemorate – and receive! – the new covenant of forgiveness in Christ's body and blood. But, we also remember – and live in! – Christ's command to love one another, even in ways that might seem difficult, uncomfortable, even disgusting. If Jesus can wash feet, so can we!

-Pastor Squire

“One in faith, in love united, all one body, You the head, when we meet, by You invited, You are with us, as You said. One with You and one another in a unity sublime, see in us Your sister, brother, one in every place and time!”

(“When You Woke That Thursday Morning” *LSB 445*, v. 4)