

## Pastor Roy's sermon – Maundy Thurs., April 5, 2012

Each year we come to Maundy Thursday of Holy Week and we ask that question again. What's a Maundy? Maundy comes from Middle English and Old French *mandé*, ultimately from the Latin *mandatum*, when Jesus tells his disciples, “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another.” In other words, today is mandate Thursday. We have a new mandate. We are to love one another.

But what does that mean? Love can mean lots of things. Watch a movie. Love can mean obsessive love. “My life will be meaningless if I cannot have you. I must have you and only you and if you reject me I will not be able to go on living! And if I can have you in my life, then all will be well and I will no longer have any problems.” It works really well in movies and books but falls flat on its face in the real life world of disappointments, dirty diapers, busy work weeks, earnest disagreements, infertility, chronic illness, and then petty things like the proper way to peel potatoes and the direction toilet paper should unroll. Obsessive and possessive love cannot last because it is based upon my needs and my wants and my desires.

Clearly Jesus is not talking about obsessive or possessive love but instead a love which gives and draws others into healthy relationships.

Jesus does not simply tell his disciples, and us to go out and love. He tells us how to love. He demonstrates in a most telling and even disturbing way. He washes his disciples feet and tells them to perform the same meaningful and helpful service for one another. In a world of dusty and muddy paths tread in sandals and simple leather shoes, washing a guest's feet was a common courtesy. A simple kindness. Either you washed as a host or you had someone else wash your guest's feet.

Now, that Jesus washed his disciples feet is no simple thing! Why did he do that and then tell them to do the same? Does it reveal to us that he was poor? Yes. Does it show us that he cared more for his disciples than for his ego? Yes. When he tells his disciples to do likewise, he is establishing a benchmark for what it means to follow him. This will not be a community of big deals seeking to carve out a legacy for themselves, clawing their way to the top—establishing their power and proving their worth by how many underlings they have. O No!

The Way for this people is that they serve one another—dying on a cross, if necessary. No surprise that the cross becomes the sign of this community. Serving, dying love. Love that puts it all on the line. “This is what I believe and proclaim and I'm willing to die for that and my friends.”

If we are the people of Jesus, is there any loving thing that we will not do to establish fellowship, to keep fellowship, to restore fellowship? Our gut tells us that it's all about protecting ourselves—about preserving our power, rightness, security, investment. Jesus commands us to love by serving our neighbor.

How do we serve and love? Love can be small, simple actions that demonstrate care: a short visit or call, a specific, practical offer of help, planting and giving flowers, yielding the right of way, knitting and praying over a prayer shawl, giving toward world hunger or habitat for humanity, planting extra beans, tomatoes, or peppers for New Hope Ministries. This year Synod Assembly is assembling 1000 school kits for Lutheran World Relief. Our conference is supplying 70 page spiral bound notebooks. Perhaps the most important place for simple, kind actions is our homes where we sow seeds of love

and nurture peace.

Jesus is teaching us that love is not about getting what we want or feel we need. Love is giving and receiving in balance. Not receiving too much and not giving too much, but being in alignment with all of creation. Freely we receive, freely we give.

For example, think about plants and animals. Can we imagine a tree that only takes water, nutrients, and carbon dioxide but never produces wood or oxygen? No. Animals take in oxygen, eat food, and produce carbon dioxide and fertilizer. The same is true emotionally. We are well when we give and receive from one another in balanced, grateful ways. This is true of money, our time and gifts, and life itself. We cannot cling to what we cannot keep without upsetting this delicate balance.

Jesus knew that he could not live forever as a human being, so when the need arose for him to let go of his life for love, he was ready and he did so freely.

His humble life of service and compassion is our life as well.

Let us follow his example in creative ways and work together as sisters and brothers of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us serve one another and the poor and rediscover life as we do. Amen.