

# Meditation for Maundy Thursday, March 29, 2018

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

*"Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."* - John 13:34

This Holy Thursday is a night different from all other nights. This is the night when our salvation, our deliverance began as our Lord passed over from life to death through the hands of sinners.

This is the night, Saints Matthew, Mark, and Luke, tell us that our Lord instituted His Holy Supper. And this is the night Saint John tells us that He gave us a new commandment, *"That you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."* It's from this new commandment, this *mandatum novum*, in Latin, from which this day gets its name: Maundy Thursday - Commandment Thursday.

These two things - His Supper - and this new commandment cannot be separated, because it's in this Supper that His love, true love, is proclaimed and delivered to you and me.

The first Passover recorded in Exodus revealed God's wrath against sin as the Lord says, *"I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments."* Tonight there is a new Passover, in which the love of God for you is revealed to you.

There's a discrepancy in the Gospels that we need to pay attention to. Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us that our Lord celebrated the Passover *"on the first day of the feast of unleavened bread."* But according to John, Jesus is crucified at the time the Passover lambs are sacrificed in the Temple, which would be the first day of the feast. So that means that either John has the wrong date, or Jesus celebrates the Passover without a Passover lamb - and celebrates it a day early, but then how can it be the first day of the feast? It's a question that has flummoxed theologians and scholars for, well, two millennia.

It turns out there were two calendars. The Sadducees in the Temple used a lunar calendar. Other Jews who rejected the Temple establishment used a solar calendar and so they

arrived at a different date for the beginning of the feast - a day ahead of the priests. And, because they had rejected the leadership of the priests they didn't use a Temple approved lamb. They used a loaf of bread, which they took to represent the Messiah who would come to liberate the Temple and the people.

And that fits with what we read in the Gospels. No lamb is mentioned at the Last Supper. Instead Jesus hands them the bread and says, "*This is my body, given for you.*" And then the cup, "*This cup is the new covenant in my blood.*" And that blood that marks the new covenant is the blood poured out as He is crucified at the same time as the Passover lambs are slain.

Jesus wants us to hear, see, and believe that He is the true Passover lamb. For the lambs of the Passover can only ever be but a symbol; a sign. They can't take away the sin of human beings. Their blood can't defeat the power of sin and death. But this body and blood that we receive at His table? His body and blood? It can indeed deliver forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation; it can free us from the slavery to sin and death, because the covenant for which it has been poured out, to cover us, is a covenant made in the blood of the One who spoke all Creation into existence. It is not a symbol, it is not a sign. It's the real deal, for the Word of God has the power to make it so.

And in that Word, from that Word made flesh comes this promise: This is My body given for you and given to you. This is My blood shed for you and given to you. Given to you to eat and drink so that you may have the very things Jesus promises - forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation; so that you may have Him; so that you may partake in a new covenant. A covenant created in the love of God who gave Himself for you.

For it's there upon the cross that you and I get to see what love really looks like; we get to see what love really is. It's God becoming one of us, one with us. Taking our humanity into His divinity so that God can take your sin, your penalty, your death and make it His, and deliver you from it. So that God can serve you in the way you most need to be served.

This is the love about which Jesus says, "*I give you a new commandment: that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.*" This love is not

a love of feelings. It's not a love mistaken for niceness. This love is the love God has for us, for you. It's the love that leads to sacrifice and service.

The washing of the disciples' feet is but a glimpse into the mystery of this divine love.

Jesus takes the form of a slave, and does the work of a slave, to point us to the work He does in our baptism - washing us clean in His blood - and His service to us on the cross.

And so then, we who receive the body and blood of this new Passover lamb are cleansed of sin, and delivered from death, and now we too can serve one another. If we want to see what that looks like we need look only to the cross, only to the body of Christ in our hands, the blood of Christ spilled forth from the cross that washes over our lips. We need only look at the One who's sacrifice and death give us life. There we will see what it is for us to love one another.

This is my body given for you. This is my blood shed for you. This my commandment that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Amen.