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# Maundy Thursday: Mandate & Servanthood

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*“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*  
*John 13:34-35 (NRSV)*

*“When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”*

***By The Rev. Dr. Larry Colvin***

The Thursday before Easter commonly known as Maundy Thursday (sometimes Holy Thursday), is a bitter-sweet day in the life of the church. It is both a reminder of Jesus’ offering bread and wine during his last meal with his disciples. It is also the evening he prayed alone in the Garden of Gethsemane before he was arrested because one of his disciples had betrayed him to the authorities. Before morning, another disciple, Peter, would three times deny knowing him.

There are several conjectures as to the derivation of the term maundy but the most commonly accepted is it comes from the Latin *mandatum novum* meaning “new commandment.”

The Gospel of John tells us that when Jesus was with his disciples he washed their feet and following this 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)

To wash the feet of a guest in your home was a sign of hospitality but it was also a humbling task. Humbling enough, slaves were not required to do it.

Here, Jesus takes the lowest role possible in stooping to wash feet. His commandment is to love one another so much to do to others as he has done for them. Because of this, many churches include the washing of feet as a part of their celebration of Maundy Thursday.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, record that Jesus gathered with his disciples to celebrate the Passover meal. Here he instituted the Lord’s Supper when he took bread and said, “This is my body,” and he took wine and said, “This is my blood.”

Here a covenant in the forgiveness of sins is shared in the pouring out of his blood. Luke records Jesus saying, “Do this in remembrance of me.” (Luke 22:19b) Because of this, congregations will gather for the sharing in communion and the remembrance of Jesus on this night.

There are two other traditions churches may choose to celebrate on this day. First is a Seder or Passover meal. It is common to conclude this meal with the sharing of communion noting the Lord’s Supper comes out of this tradition.

Some churches, following communion, may hold a service of *tenebrae* or shadows. As scripture is read, candles are extinguished until there is total darkness. Others may share in this observance on Good Friday the following night.

*The Rev. Larry Colvin is the pastor of the First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Dexter.*

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