

Monday/Thursday

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ. We begin tonight what could be described as the three "Super Days" in the life of the church. Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter. Tonight we focus on Maundy Thursday, or as some of our younger children say, "Monday/Thursday".

Maundy - an interesting word. Each year I conduct a survey, a poll - quite unscientific, but interesting. Just before Maundy Thursday I ask at least 10 people a question. I actually chose people who I know attend church on a regular basis. The poll is limited to only one question - "What does Maundy mean"? Invariably the response from all participants is "I have no idea". So how about you? What does Maundy mean? (*congregation is asked the question*). Hopefully at the end of this homily you will know the answer.

But let's first set the stage. It's been a busy week in the life of Jesus. First, on Sunday, we had the march into Jerusalem. Jesus enters the Holy City to a fanfare of emotions. Hosanna to the Son of David. People excited and mayhem in the city. Over the next few days he has major confrontations with the establishment. Namely, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. He overturns the tables of these money changers in the Temple and in so doing hits them in their pocketbooks. Shares some parables when confronted by these two groups - namely the 2 sons and the jar of perfume which produces a livid response. Undermining their authority. The fireworks were better than our presidential debates.

Now it is time to celebrate the Passover. That's why everybody was in Jerusalem, the Holy City. Jesus wants to celebrate the Passover with his closest people, his disciples. The Passover meal is a long, elaborate process that basically retells the story of the Exodus. Involves much wine, unleavened bread, bitter herbs, and always involved the Haggadah. The telling of four questions. Why is this night different from other nights? Why only Matzah? Why the dipping? Why the bitter herbs? As the younger person, perhaps John answers the questions, the entire Exodus story would be told. A story about how God saved his people. They would eat lamb. Straight from the Exodus. The blood of the lamb would be put on the doorpost and the angel of death would "Passover" these houses.

As is customary with Jesus, during this meal he made some changes. He was an agent of change. When it came time to eat the lamb and to remember that God provided the blood of the lamb to save his people, Jesus looked everyone in the eye and said, "I will be the lamb that takes away the sin of the world." He would be the sacrifice that would save his people.

Then he does something very different at the Passover meal. "This is my body given for you, this is my blood shed for you." He gave us Communion, which we celebrate as a Sacrament every week. It unites us together whatever church we find ourselves in.

A Story.

At least once a year I travel to Salam Arabic Lutheran Church in Brooklyn. I support this ministry, probably because the Pastor is a friend of mine and it gives me an opportunity to visit the old neighborhood. The worship service is in Arabic. Very hard for a kid who only understands English and Norwegian. If you are in the pews, it is a little strange. The person next to you is singing the hymns, the liturgy in Arabic. All the prayers are spoken in Arabic even the Lord's Prayer. You finish the Prayers but not together. The English Lord's Prayer finishes first. But when it comes to Communion a wonderful thing happens. All the people come and kneel at the rail and I say, "jasad almasih almaetaa lak" – the body of Christ given for you. No longer were we different. We were one in Christ. All together feeling the love of Jesus. What a marvelous feeling.

The second thing he did had to do with feet and dirt. Remember in those days people did not sit at a dining room table. They reclined on the floor with many feet close to people's heads. These feet were dirty and smelly. They didn't have nice paved roads outside the dwelling places. Feet needed to be washed prior to eating. Servants would wash the feet. Hosts did not wash feet. Peter and Jesus have a mini argument and Jesus says "Peter, what I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this".

What was this? After this - what did Jesus say after? Glad you asked.

He actually says the all important phrase that has to do with the word Maundy. He says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another".

Commandment comes from the Latin, Mandatum novum do vobis.
Mandatum- mandate- command- commandment- new commandment.
We could call this day New Commandment Thursday.

Now you know what the word Maundy means - now we need to practice it.
Not getting even but forgiveness
Not judgement- but mercy
Not anger- but humility and kindness
Not criticism- but acceptance.

He instituted communion at this Passover meal so that we could put this New
Commandment into practice. He knew that if we did it we would be happier and
tremendously fulfilled.

Amen- Let it be so.