

## Maundy Thursday Homily

Anyone ever wonder why they call it Maundy Thursday? Truthfully it took me about 35 years to ask the question, not proud of that. Frankly, every time I type it into Microsoft Word it surprises me that auto correct doesn't kick in with something like Mandy or meander. The word Maundy is an English translation of the Latin word Mandatum, which simply means command. In John 13 Jesus says to his disciples, "a new command(ment) I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you."

Commands are tricky things. At times when a command is given we might have a visceral aversion response. Or if you are someone who has worked in an extreme hierarchical environment, you don't give much thought to a command, you just do it because that's how you've been trained. We live in an era of extreme individualism in which everything from our diet, to the clothes we wear, to who we will be, is ultimately determined by our choosing. Anything that sounds like a command would be an affront to my individuality. In light of these views on commands, Jesus speaks to us through the Scriptures and what he has to offer is a command.

Invitations and commands seem to be opposites don't they? Something doesn't quite jive. Not when they come from the mouth of our Lord. When Jesus sits down with his disciples to share this meal he gives them an invitation and command, do this in remembrance of me. Not if you feel like it, not if you get around to it, do it. When Jesus later a new command I give to you, love one another as I have loved you, this too is a command, as well as an invitation.

Caught up in the commands of Jesus is a world of mystery, an expanse of opportunity, and untold blessings waiting to be experienced. But as is so true of our nature, we want to define the terms, clarify the thing commanded. So, we parse the meaning. How many times has the church wrestled with when to have communion: who is invited and who's not; is it Christ's actual physical body on the table or is it a symbol for us to remember; do we pass through the aisles or come forward; do we use grape juice or wine; dip the bread or (gasp) drink from a common cup; leavened or unleavened; gluten free or gluten filled. And what happens is we parse the gift right out of the thing itself—and with it the joy.

And tragically we do the same thing when it comes to the love of our neighbors—who do we have to love and who are we permitted not to love.

But this shouldn't come as a surprise to us, the disciples did the same thing. Peter was unwilling to let the Lord wash his feet in John 13 because he couldn't get over his pride. The disciples bicker and dispute in Luke 22 over who is the greatest. In Matthew 20, after hearing that Jesus would be handed over, condemned and killed then on the third day raised, James and John's Mother's first response: Jesus you think you could make a place for my boys at your left and right. Jesus even tells a parable of wage earners who are all given the same generous wage for a days work, even when some work more than others. When we parse the terms we miss the generosity of the landowner's wage.

When we do this with communion or with the great command to love one another what we are left with is a word and an experience that feels very far from the thing that Jesus commanded us to experience. No wonder there are so many who see Christians of all stripes as joyless curmudgeons, we've parsed the Spirit of the gift right out of the Word.

Jesus tells us the table we're about to gather around is a foretaste of the Heavenly Banquet that the Father is preparing for his children. These gifts we ingest into our bodies and into our souls are, by the Holy Spirit, mysteriously somehow Jesus' actual life within us. That when we do it, what we are remembering is the God of the Cosmos who created you and me and all the little children, reminding us that he's not too busy with more important things to be near to us. That Jesus, in emptying himself of all of his divinity, allows himself to become as the Old Reformer Calvin says: our propitiation (the one who makes us right before God and satisfies God's holy requirements).

If you have been rescued from certain disaster, is your first response to scrutinize the reason for the rescue. Nope. You say thank you, and then you celebrate because—to paraphrase another great parable—you once were lost and now have been found. Joy and celebration and freedom is your new reality.

And whenever I look for the words of Scripture to give voice to the praise in my heart I want to express, I go to the Psalms. Psalm 116 gives us

I can imagine the savior sitting around the table with his disciples, a few of them arguing among themselves who is the greatest and who will be seated closest to Jesus in the Kingdom banquet. They are already starting to fritter and fret about secondary issues. Issues that were not theirs to be concerned with in the first place. There they are

Disciples actions that empty the promise and the command of its meaning

John 13:6 – Peter unwilling to let Jesus wash his feet.

Luke 22 – The disciples start to bicker and dispute about who is the greatest

Matthew 20 – James and John's mother, upon hearing Jesus would be handed over, condemned and killed then on the third day raised, her first response upon hearing this is kneels before Jesus in what seems to be a tender moment, but the words that proceed from her mouth are...Jesus, yes mama Thunder...can my boys sit at your right and left hand in the kingdom. This was the last thing she should have asked.

Magnitude of the meal leads to joy-filled response. We give back not because we have to because we can't not—its such a wonderful gift.