

Tonight, we mark Maundy Thursday. Tonight is also the second night of Passover for our Jewish friends. During the season of Passover, families and friends have a traditional meal called the Seder. The foods of the Seder meal are symbolic of the foods the Jews ate when they escaped from slavery in Egypt. Foods that did not need lots of preparation, such as unleavened bread. And foods that remind them of slavery, such as bitter herbs. Also, during this meal, there are traditional readings and a series of four questions that a child asks of the adults.

The phrase that is said before the four questions is, “Why is this night different from all other nights?”<sup>[1]</sup> It is a question that we Christians could ask of ourselves tonight. Not because our holy day falls during Passover, but because this is a unique night in our tradition. This night is so different that we need pages of instructions for how to prepare for and conduct this service. Maundy Thursday comes but once a year, and we are unlikely to remember every little detail of what we are supposed to do.

While all the actions in the liturgy are important, it is not the choreography that makes this night different from any other. The choreography is a way of telling and acting out the story of this important night. It is a way of showing us how we are to be part of the remembrance and reliving this unique night.

Tonight is different because Maundy Thursday is the night when Jesus said, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”<sup>[2]</sup> Compared to the 613 commandments in the Hebrew Bible, this one might seem straightforward, if not remarkably simple. We just are to love one another. Yet compared to all the other commandments, this is by far the hardest to keep. I wonder why?

What is it about human nature that makes it hard for us to love one another? Let’s look at families. We are made in the image of our parents. Some look like mom and others look like dad. We have similar habits, likes, and dislikes. Yet, families can have vicious squabbles. We fight over whether mom and dad loved one of us more, who gets more presents, who gets more support, who is punished more, who has more access to the family inheritance, and on and on. If we cannot get along with our own family, how do we expect to love one another?

Loving one another does not mean liking them or wanting to spend lots of time with them. It does not mean wanting them to have their way. Indeed, loving someone may mean that they do not get what they want. Loving someone, whether they are a family member or not, means wanting the best for their soul.

Jesus’ love was so powerful it even overcame betrayal and the cross. Earlier in John’s Gospel, he writes, “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” What strikes me about this passage is that it

implies that Jesus loved all of his disciples, even the one who would betray him to the end. Judas was one of his own in the world, and knowing that Judas would betray him, he loved him to the end. Jesus later shows his love by washing the feet of his disciples. The Gospel says, “Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet.” The Gospel does not indicate that he washed all of their feet but Judas. Later, it reads “After he had washed their feet,” there is no exception made for Judas. He knows Judas will betray, and he washes his feet anyway.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus forgives those who have crucified him. He says, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”<sup>[3]</sup> Even as he hangs nearly naked dying on the cross, while the soldiers divide up his clothing, Jesus is able to offer those who are killing him.

The power of the love that Jesus has is incredible. But because he is fully human, his love is within our grasp. We may find it difficult to achieve. We may have inward struggles over it. We will undoubtedly fail and need to try again. But Jesus also said, “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” We are to be known by our love. It is not our morality, piety, churchiness, but our love that makes us known as Jesus’.

As our former presiding bishop said, “If it is not about love it is not about God.”<sup>[4]</sup> We must find the love in our hearts. Nurture it and see it grow. Let it push out the fear, anger, and exclusion. Let the love take over. Without exception, love one another. That is how the world will know us and how Jesus will know us when we are called home.

<sup>[1]</sup> For more information, go to [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ma\\_Nishtana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ma_Nishtana)

<sup>[2]</sup> John 13:34 NRSVUE

<sup>[3]</sup> Luke 23:34 NRSVUE

<sup>[4]</sup> The Rt. Rev. Michael Curry