

“A New Commandment”

Maundy Thursday is the night of the Institution of the Lord’s Supper, but it gets its name from Jesus giving a new commandment. Maundy is derived from the Old French *mandé* which is derived from *mandatum* in Latin.

As we just heard, Jesus, in John’s Gospel says, “I give you a new commandment [or Maundy], that you love one another. 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.”

That seems profound, but also pretty easy. Yet within a matter of hours nearly every one of the twelve has broken that commandment. Before Jesus’ arrest they go to the Garden of Gethsemane with him, but they cannot even stay awake as he prays his heart out a few feet away. In the meantime, one disciple betrays Jesus to the Temple authorities. Later another disciple will deny knowing Jesus just outside where Jesus is being interrogated. The rest of the disciples disappear melting into the Passover crowds fearing for their own lives, and abandoning Jesus to his religious persecutors and the Roman governor.

We are left wondering what we would have done. Can we can stay awake with Jesus in our own Garden of Gethsemane? If so, should we pray for strength, peace, in thanksgiving for Jesus, or in thanks that we were not put to that test that the disciples were.

I encourage you to treat these next days not as a remembrance or a holiday that interrupts your regular plans and activities. Rather live into the very depths of this holy Paschal Triduum. Feel the wonder of this night experiencing the Lord’s Supper as if you were one of the disciples present at the first one. Pray with Jesus in Gethsemane and stay awake unlike the disciples. Experience the fear and anxiety as Jesus is arrested. Feel, as the disciples did, vulnerable because your leader is under arrest and they might be coming for you next.

Feel the sadness, helplessness and loss as Jesus is crucified and dies. Wonder why he did not teach you how to save him or how to fight the Romans. Wonder if you have the courage to join Joseph of Arimathea in taking Jesus’ body down, enshrouding it and placing it in a tomb. Wonder if you would have kept away in fear that you would be arrested and crucified as one of his followers.

Even if you can only spend a little time with Jesus or those that followed him these next few days, I believe that Easter Day will be more than chocolate bunnies, Easter eggs, and Peeps. The gift of the resurrection of Jesus will be a light that breaks through the darkness you slipped into as you followed Jesus to the cross and then the tomb. This light will shine forth more brightly than ever before.

But for tonight, tomorrow and Saturday stay in the moment with Jesus and his followers. Abide with the women and men who trusted in Jesus and endured a very dark night of the soul not knowing what would become of themselves or the movement started by this itinerant rabbi from Nazareth. Live into the time when the light that had shined in the darkness was overcome by the gloom and the new commandment was seemingly unraveled before their eyes. The light does overcome the darkness, but to experience its full power we have to have the darkness first.