

**Maundy Thursday**  
**April 9, 2020**  
**John 13:34-35**

***“Deliver Us, Jesus, That We May Love One Another”***

It's Maundy Thursday, and here we are: gathered in the choir loft of the Sanctuary at St. John's while you are in your living rooms or family rooms at home, watching this service. We chose this location for our service this evening to have as our backdrop the Chancel with the suspended cross and its shadowing that are especially appropriate in Holy Week worship. This will be a Holy Week and Easter Sunday that we will carry with us for the rest of our lives. As future years come and go, we will remember clearly this particular year of 2020. It is clear that the Lord is opening new doors of opportunity to share the Gospel virtually. As we have scrambled to move quickly to online worship services, it has stretched us to continue proclaiming the good news of Jesus, but in new ways. Truth be told, we are impacting far more lives virtually than we could ever do in person. And so we have stumbled into this new era of ministry under circumstances that we would never have chosen for ourselves. What will be the lasting impact of these necessary changes? How will life be different going forward post-coronavirus? All of these remain to be seen as the future unfolds in the days ahead. But the good news is that the same Lord Jesus Christ who has been in the midst of his people during adverse times and difficult days in the past is with us even now. His right hand is leading us, and his love is upholding us. The message for this Maundy Thursday rises up out of the closing words of Jesus in the Gospel lesson: **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”** (John 13:34-35), and is entitled, *“Deliver Us, Jesus, That We may Love One Another.”* May the Lord's rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus' sake.

This day is sometimes called Maundy Thursday as well as Holy Thursday. Both refer to the same day, and this day, like Palm Sunday/Sunday of the Passion, has a dual emphasis. First, Maundy Thursday commemorates Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper, which we heard about in the Epistle lesson for this evening (1 Corinthians 11:23-32). That strange word “maundy,” is really a mash-up of two Latin words: *novum*, meaning “new,” and *mandatum*, where we get our word “mandate,” or command. Maundy Thursday then literally means “New Command Thursday,” reminding us of Jesus' new command that his disciples love one another as he has loved us. The Lord's Supper, the Sacrament of the Altar, has its origins in the Passover meal, which is what Jesus and his disciples were celebrating “on the night in which he was betrayed.” The Passover is rooted in the tenth and final plague which God brought upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians, which we heard about in the Old Testament lesson for this evening (Exodus 12:1-14). The firstborn of the Egyptians were struck down while God's people were “passed over” and kept safe because of the blood of the lamb that marked their doorposts and lintels. There are some striking parallels from this to our own day today: “God's people Israel were instructed to shelter-in-place as a pandemic swept through the nation of Egypt. This plague passed over the homes of those who believed God's promises and in faith put on their doorposts the blood of a lamb. Today as we shelter-in-place and pray for God to deliver us from this pandemic we are experiencing in our day, we can do so with the assurance that the doorposts of our hearts are covered with the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God who has come to take away the sins of the world” (Rev. Travis Guse, post from Southeastern District Yapp on 4/8/20). The Passover meal, even today, recalls God's gracious deliverance of his people from slavery and setting them free. In fact, the Hebrew word for Passover, *pesach*, (פסח) is the root of the word “Easter” in many languages: *Pascua* in Spanish; *Pâques* in French; *Pasqua* in Italian. The institution of the Lord's Supper and its roots in the Passover is the first theme of Maundy Thursday, but there is a second theme, and that is what we hear in the Gospel lesson: Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet (which John alone records) and his call for them – and us – to love one another as he has loved us. Because of the coronavirus, we are not able to gather as a congregation to receive the Lord's Supper, including on this

night when we give thanks for Jesus' institution of it. We pray for, and look forward to, the day when we can once again gather together around both Word and Sacrament, God's gifts that call us and sustain us in faith.

It's a funny thing in life when what we long for may not be exactly what we really want after all. We may long for more time with our loved ones, and now here it is. The stay-at-home orders that are in place have led to a whole lot of togetherness for people under the same roof – maybe too much togetherness, as many people have shared. And for those who live alone, it has been challenging in a different way with little or no socialization with friends or loved ones. And so how do we love one another now in the midst of the coronavirus? How do we love one another as Christ has loved us when we feel confined and closed in at home? Jesus' call to love one another calls us to virtual love right now; love that has social distancing boundaries, not only for our sake but also for the sake of those around us. In the midst of the challenges that we face with life in the time of the coronavirus, amazing things are happening all around us as people look not to themselves only, but to the needs of others. Neighbors are really proving to be neighbors as they care for one another. The kindness of strangers is everywhere. And that is love – not just in word, but in deed. An ancient hymn for Maundy Thursday puts it this way: “Where charity and love prevail, There God is ever found; Brought here together by Christ's love, By love are we thus bound” (*Lutheran Service Book* #845, stanza 1).

After instituting the Lord's Supper and washing the disciples' feet, Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was there in the garden that Jesus was betrayed by one of his own, setting in motion a chain of events that would lead to his crucifixion. As we enter into these solemn days that recall our Savior's suffering and death, it is important to bear in mind that Jesus was not a helpless victim. For the sake of love, Jesus *allowed* himself to be subjected to arrest and mock trial; gross injustice and political expediency; horrendous suffering and scorn; even rejection by his heavenly Father. And why? Why this storm of rage and abuse? It is as Jesus said: “**And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil**” (John 3:19). And yet, “**The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it**” (John 1:5). Jesus is that Light shining in our darkness. In delivering himself up to death on the cross, Jesus has delivered us from death. He himself is love – love that is self-giving and sacrificial; love that does not ask, “What's in this for me?” “**In this is love, not we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another**” (1 John 4:10-11).

On this Maundy Thursday, we celebrate the truth that Jesus has delivered us so that we may love one another. God help us to do this for Jesus' sake. Amen.