

April 2, 2026
Maundy Thursday

“As I Have Loved You”

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

In confirmation and new member classes when beginning to teach the Ten Commandments I often make the point that nobody likes to obey the rules. I guess that's just part of our fallen sinful nature. God's design for His creation is good and perfect, and His Holy law outlined in the commandments is simply living out the divine directive to love God and love neighbor. Thus, we really should eagerly and joyfully desire to live within God's holy law.

Yet we always seem to come back to viewing the 10 Commandments as the rules we resent. The resentment part actually makes sense. We cannot keep the law perfectly and breaking the rules normally means punishment, so yeah, we resent that which leads to our punishment. Sounds about right. If obedience to the law is required, yet to rightly obey is impossible, you will have antipathy for the law and hatred for the God who imposes it.

That's wrong thinking, of course. Yahweh is always a God of love and mercy. It is mankind's continual rebellion against God that leads to our anger toward Him and despair over our inability to come into His holy presence.

This is why Christ's words that Thursday night are so comforting to us. *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

Everything hinges on that phrase *“just as I have loved you.”* I'm quite sure at the time Jesus spoke these words the disciples didn't get it. They are confused and befuddled and will only become more so as Christ's Passion plays out. But later, by the power of the Holy Spirit, they will realize how Christ has loved them, and loved us.

Jesus Christ is true glorious God! The humility He examples to the disciples doesn't even come close to the reality. They see a beloved rabbi taking the role of a slave in washing their feet. The reality to which this points is divine Son of God taking on human flesh that in this flesh He would become the despised of God, the very cursed aberration of human sin which ruined His beloved creation. Jesus loves us in becoming the worst of humanity, despised by God, in order to save the underserving mankind that stands rebellious to its Creator.

In light of this, *“just as I have loved you”* changes everything! We call tonight Maundy Thursday because Maundy comes from the Latin for “commandment”. You'd think the last thing we'd need is another commandment because we really stink at keeping the first ten. But the *“just as I have loved you”* points to Jesus keeping all of those commandments perfectly and thus fulfilling the law in our place. *“Just as I have loved you”* points to Christ taking the punishment for our failures upon Himself so the wrath of God stands spent, with nothing left for us. *“Just as I have loved you”* is Christ's resurrection and promise to bring us from death unto Himself forever.

This commandment is not law; it's Gospel. It is the promise that because of Jesus, those who follow Him are enabled to love as Jesus loves. Hatred of God is removed and replaced with the joy of being adopted into His family by grace. Sins forgiven and the law rendered powerless, we love one another as we have been loved.

Still, we look around our lives and we see a lot of lack of love, both of God and of neighbor. Because of that we're tempted to receive Jesus' command as just one more rule that we

can't keep and thus deserve condemnation. Satan would like nothing better than to take our failure and use it to poison this Gospel.

Thanks be to God that Jesus gives another gift that Thursday night, the new Passover meal; the Holy Supper of His body and blood—the antidote to that which attempts to poison the Gospel.

It's really ironic that John's Gospel doesn't recall the Lord's Supper, yet in relating the "*As I have loved you*" he really encompasses that gift. The Lord's Supper Jesus institutes, again and again forgives sins, nourishes faith and uplifts our souls with the accomplished promise of salvation. This is how Jesus loves us, and this is how Christians best love one another.

It is most certainly true we fail in this love for one another time and again. But in Christ we are restored and renewed, and in that enabled to go forth again in love of God and neighbor. Christ's body and blood is in essence His love for us; the benefit manifested by His cross and empty tomb. We come to the rail in shameful repentance, bereft of any holiness or perfect love...and we receive holiness and perfect love right into ourselves in Christ's body and blood! We bring in in ourselves the poison of sin and death; Jesus feeds us His righteousness and resurrected life.

We walk away full, full of the Christ who has been fed to us, full of the love He has lavished upon us. This is why we can love. He is why we can love.

This is why I want to make abundantly clear that you are to receive this Maundy Thursday directive as a divine blessing and not a burden. "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*"

Do not look at your life and see yourself failing at this. I know, it can look terrible according to us. But Christ has loved you, healed you and made you a child of God. This command is more of an invitation to live in His love, in the forgiveness that redefines you as holy and very good despite the fallen nature still clinging to you.

If you want to better live out this grace, and I think we all want that, I think the trick is to focus on the "*as I have loved you*" part of things; the Jesus part of the equation.

If you're looking at the law all the time you've no choice but to be looking at your performance under it, and that will bring no joy and lead to little love. Looking at Christ you see God's grace, Christ's perfect performance for your sake. You see humble, selfless, adoring love being poured out upon you so much that you can taste it—in fact given in just that manner in the Eucharist.

He inspires you to love one another, forgive one another, uplift one another. He inspires you to be Christ to one another as He has loved you.

The law is good and holy and right and all that without a doubt. But it is not why you love God and love neighbor. Jesus is the Gospel, the love of God made incarnate in human flesh to save humanity for the God who loves it. Focus on that love. Eagerly receive it in the Holy Supper. Live in the reality it has made of you.

Forgiven in Christ wherever you fail, trust that, in Christ, you are loving as He loves you. Amen.