

**A Sermon from the Episcopal Parish of
St. John the Evangelist in Hingham, Massachusetts
Preached by the Rev. Timothy E. Schenck on April 9, 2020 (Maundy Thursday)**

Well, this is one way to get out of having your feet washed on Maundy Thursday. Or at least avoiding that inner struggle about whether or not you should embrace the discomfort of taking your shoes and socks off in church, because you know that's kind of the point, or whether you should just stay in your pew because, well, you're pretty sure you forgot to clip your toenails.

So that's one "advantage" of attending this service virtually, I guess. And, of course, you're welcome to go soak your feet after you log off.

You may know that the word "maundy," in Maundy Thursday, comes from the Latin *mandatum*, meaning commandment. It's where we get the English word "mandate." And we call this day Maundy Thursday because after washing the disciples' feet, Jesus says, "I give you a new commandment, 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's quite a charge, and it's significant that Jesus calls this a "commandment." This was a word dripping with meaning for the disciples — the Ten Commandments, after all, stood at the very heart of the Law of Moses. So the fact that Jesus points to the call to love one another as a *commandment* highlights its importance. For Jesus, love is not optional. Maundy Thursday isn't Suggestion Thursday; it's New Commandment Thursday, and that commandment is abundantly clear: "love one another as I have loved you."

Over the next several days, love will be embodied in Jesus Christ. Love will be betrayed; love will be mocked; love will be crucified; love will be buried; love will conquer death. That's the power of love. That's the power of this faith which was entrusted to the disciples at the Last Supper, the same faith that has been entrusted to you and me.

This evening we join with Jesus and the disciples in that Upper Room. We come bearing and sharing all of the burdens of uncertainty and fear, of hesitation and trepidation. And we listen for the voice of the one who calmed the storm, the one who healed the sick, the one who raised the dead. Above the din of our anxiety and all that rages around us, we listen for this voice. The voice of Jesus. And this voice speaks of hope. This voice speaks of life. This voice speaks of love.

Like many of you, I have been taking walks around town the last few weeks. Most days, Bryna and I try to get outside after yet another Zoom call and more attempts to find toilet paper and dog food online. And one of the things I love is running into fellow parishioners and waving or having a brief chat from a safe distance or watching their kids ride by on bikes. And what truly gladdens my heart in these brief conversations is hearing about how people in this community are taking care of one another. Of making phone calls and checking in on those who live alone and running errands and writing notes. Over the past weeks, I have seen and heard so many examples, both big and small, of people loving one another as Jesus loves us.

By demonstrating our love for one another in seemingly ordinary ways during these extraordinary times, we have an opportunity to let the world know — and to remind ourselves — that we are disciples of Jesus Christ.

The thing is, we need this new commandment, this *mandatum*, now more than ever. When the impulse is to hoard, Jesus says give it away; when the impulse is to tribalism, Jesus says build beloved community; when the impulse is to fear, Jesus says love.

We are living in a moment when the world is crying out for a new commandment, a new way of being, a new way of loving. And all we have to do to look for a path forward is to gaze upon the actions in an Upper Room in Jerusalem on the last night of our Lord's earthly life. That's where we see love enacted and embodied. The question for all of us on this night is how will we practice *mandatum* in the weeks and months ahead? How will we take the spirit of the Upper Room out into the world? Because that's our charge, that's our commandment.

Although we are worshipping virtually right now, there is nothing "virtual" about our faith. This world needs the love of Jesus more than ever in this moment. It needs us all to demonstrate the love of Jesus. It needs *you* to share the love of Jesus with your neighbor. Not with hugs or washing feet or even, and this pains me more than you know, by sharing the Eucharist. But by praying for one another, by protecting the most vulnerable among us, by sharing our resources with those in need, by reaching out to those who are isolated and alone, by supporting those who are on the front lines of this pandemic by caring for the sick or packing groceries or seeking a vaccine.

The world needs the love of Jesus right now and you, my friends, *you* have been entrusted with the new commandment, issued on this very night, to love one another as Jesus loves us. And make no mistake, it is the love of Jesus, as made known on the night before he died for us, that will see us through.