

Maundy Thursday Sermon, Hannah Moderow
April 14, 2022 / St. Mary's Episcopal Church

If you knew it was your last night on earth with those closest to you, what would you do?

What would you *do* with those final precious hours? And what would you say?

Here we are at *that* night in Holy Week. Maundy Thursday. The name comes from Latin *mandatum novum* which means new commandment.¹

As you just heard in the Gospel reading, Jesus gave a New Commandment on this night. He said, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

We might call it Commandment Thursday, but I wonder if Love Thursday is a better name for tonight?

The Gospel reading gives us a glimpse into what Jesus chose to do on this night. He knew what was coming, even though his disciples did not, and his choice of actions and words are here for us to ponder.

What would you *do* with those final hours?

I can't speak for you, but I have my doubts that I'd decide to wash the feet of those closest to me.

That's probably *not* at all what I'd do.

I can't say for sure, but I imagine I would cling to the tangible beauty of this world.

I might....

Lie down in a patch of tundra. Taste a handful of wild blueberries. Hug my family and friends tight. Take a long hard look at the sky. Write a letter to those I love. Receive prayers and blessings.

¹ [Maundy Thursday – The Episcopal Church](#)

Jesus' choice of what to do on his last night is surprising... and humbling. It was *not* all about him. It was about community.

He washed the dirty feet of those around to him. Is that what you would do?

And what would you say in those final precious hours?

For me, this question is a little easier to think about. Telling friends and family that I love them and want love for them certainly comes to mind.

But in true Jesus fashion, he doesn't just say "I love you."

He says I have loved you, so spread that love.

Okay, okay, those are my words to sum up his.

In John's Gospel, he says, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

For Jesus, Love isn't to be kept. It's to be shared and spread. Love is a community act.

This command to Love must have felt impossible to his disciples on the very next day when Jesus was crucified. It's also a difficult message to swallow these days, after two years of a global pandemic... and with the perpetual unrest and injustices that plague our world.

The kind of Love that Jesus commands is exhausting.

So when I say Love Thursday, I don't mean rainbows and puppies and euphoric love.

I mean fierce love. Hard love. The kind of love that asks an awful lot of us.

During COVID times, I suspect we have all wondered at some point: what if we find ourselves alone in our final hours, unable to be with those closest to us?

Perhaps you lost a family member or friend to just that dreaded situation—

Or maybe you're a hospital worker who was tasked with standing in for family in the final hours of a life.

It's all so heartbreaking.

Or perhaps you've seen or endured different kinds of suffering that required a different kind of love. The Jesus kind of love that is active, unconditional, and in community with others.

On this holy night, with the story in front of us, I think about what LOVE has called and demanded of each one of us.

During lent this year, our community at St. Mary's has shared stories as a way to dream for our future. Inspired by this process, I've asked a number of you to answer this question:

What has LOVE called you to do in the time of COVID?

I'm going to read just a few snippets from the answers I received. I've also placed the long answers in the narthex in case you want to read them.

From a mental health professional

Love has called me to sit and be with people in despair and loneliness.

From an educator

Love has called me to embrace struggle in order to grow... And to love others—especially our children—by being WITH them as they struggle.

From a bartender

Love has called me to witness the very best in people and the very worst in people.... Right now, the world is not very kind. To give an experience of good food or friendship is a way I can make a day better.

From a school principal

Love calls me to show up every day for the students, teachers and staff and be a source of stability, positivity, and care.

From an exhausted single working mom

LOVE called me to soften. We're all struggling, flawed, and created in the image of the divine. Let's take it easier on ourselves.

From a young child

Love has called me to give hugs. Even if I need to wear a mask.

From a parent and physician

Love has called me to slow down and focus on my family, both at home and at work. Love has helped me to make more time for what is important to me.

From a clinical therapist

Love has called me to lean into what nurtures and sustains us with wild affection.

From a retiree

Love has called me to TRY to maintain unconditional love for people whose views I find appalling. Sometimes it's really hard to love unconditionally. I don't know how Jesus did it.

From a journalist

Love has caused me to cultivate acceptance by really listening to people to hear their individual ideas and fears, rather than automatically, quietly judging them by whether their politics align with mine.

From a parent and public health worker

Love has called me to keep showing up. Even when I didn't think I had anything left.

From a physician

Love has shown me that all children are our children. We need one another.

It's clear from these words that LOVE has called us to do many hard things.

During COVID, some of us have loved by washing our hands, wearing masks, and staying home most of the time.

Others of us have walked straight into harm's way to ensure there were groceries on shelves, children learning in the classroom, or to care for others.

Some of us needed to receive love, before finding love within us. And that's okay, too.

For many of us there has been a softening amidst the struggle. An unexpected slow-down of our lives with more silence and time to appreciate the little things.

Like an unexpected doorstep delivery. Or a good conversation around a bonfire in the dead of Alaska winter.

Or watching kids hug again after months of separation. Grandparents united with grandchildren.

And... Walking into the sanctuary of St. Mary's after nearly two years of staying home.

Jesus knew how hard it would be for his disciples—and for all of us-- to live out his New Commandment of love in community. He also knew how essential this love would be.

Next in the service, we've often done a foot-washing to commemorate when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples.

Tonight, to change things up a little bit, you're invited to participate in a hand-washing, if you wish.

A parishioner here at St. Mary's recently said, "During the past two years, even washing your hands has become a symbol of love."

So...

As we continue through Holy Week, navigating this fragile world while looking for sparks of resurrection to come, may we all be encouraged by LOVE--the Jesus kind of love that is active, unconditional, and in community with others.

Here's to a holy Love Thursday.

Amen.