

Maundy Thursday

Mandatum novum do vobis ut diligatis invicem sicut dilexi vos



In the gospels we read that on the day before his crucifixion Jesus had his final meal with his disciples. This meal became known as the Last Supper. Later it was also known as Maundy Thursday when Christians remember:

- The Passover and Exodus
- The Communion Service & A New Covenant
- Feet Washing
- The New Commandment to Love

At this meal Jesus gave the command to his disciples, “Love one another as I have loved you.” The first Bibles were written in Latin and his command translates as

Mandatum novum do vobis ut diligatis invicem sicut dilexi vos.

MAUNDY is named from the word MANDATUM - COMMAND

The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke state explicitly that the Last Supper was a Passover Meal, whereas John simply states that Jesus and his disciples were at supper (John 13:2). In John’s gospel we read that the emphasis of the last supper is not the Passover or the exodus to freedom but on a new command of Jesus to love one another and to serve one another.

Passover and Exodus

Jesus and his disciples were meeting for a meal to remember and celebrate the most momentous and miraculous delivery of the Israelite nation after 430 years of slavery in Egypt. (Ex 12:40) In Exodus we read the Israelites were told by Moses to kill a lamb, paint the blood on the door frame, then roast the lamb and eat it with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. When God 'passed over' their houses they were all saved but the first born of the Egyptians died. This first Passover meal was their last meal before they departed from Egypt and went into the desert. Moses later gave instructions from God that the Passover should be celebrated each year with a special meal including unleavened bread.

“This is a day to remember. Each year from Generation to Generation you must celebrate it as a special festival to the Lord. This is a law for all time (Ex 12:14).



Preparing for God to pass over



The sacrificial lamb – Paschal Lamb



Meal eaten in haste with unleavened bread



Communion Service & The New Covenant

In the first three gospels we read that Jesus' last meal with his disciples was the Passover meal. He gave them bread and wine which represented his body and his blood. These were the symbols for God's new covenant. At this time Judas left to betray Jesus.

Paul emphasises this betrayal in 1 Corinthians "The Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed, took a piece of bread, broke it and gave thanks saying: "This is my body which is broken for you. Do this in memory of me." He then took the cup saying "This is God's new covenant sealed with my blood. Whenever you drink it do this in memory of me" (1 Cor 11:23-26). This Last Supper of Jesus is the foundation for the Christian tradition of sharing communion.

Jesus asks us to remember his death. As the Lamb of God Jesus was fulfilling the meaning of Passover, his own broken body and shed blood freeing us from sin and death.

The promise of a New Covenant is realised through the crucifixion as now we can have a new personal relationship with God through Jesus. The Old Covenant received by Moses from God which demanded strict adherence to the law has been replaced by this New Covenant.

The communion service has critical importance for Christians as we share with friends, who love each other, to remember the sacrifice of Jesus. This should strengthen our relationship with him as well as each other and encourage us to live more like Jesus. For these reasons I believe the communion service is at the heart of being church. We cannot take part if there is any impediment between any of us



Feet Washing

During the supper Jesus took off his outer clothes, tied a towel round his waist and washed the feet of each disciple including Judas, drying them with the towel and instructing them to wash each other's feet. (John 13: 14-17). This was an extraordinary action to demonstrate the importance of humility and serving others.

Jesus lowered himself to do a job that was usually carried out by a Gentile or slave. Jesus is teaching us that we need to put self aside – symbolically shown by him removing his garment – to give service to others, to imitate his loving humility.

Jesus says: "If I your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet you ought to wash one another's feet. You should do as I have done to you. A servant is not greater than his master. No servant is greater than his Master, nor is the messenger greater than the one who sent him." This emphasises clearly that we cannot think we are too important or too good for the most menial task. We are not too important that we cannot follow his commands. We must put aside our status to become a servant. Whatever position we may hold at work, in society or in the church we are commanded to serve with humility. His own actions spell out that we are not above him. This was the ultimate example of showing the disciples and us the act of servant leadership.



In John's gospel (13:1-17) we read that after washing the disciples' feet Jesus declared that one of them would betray him. Judas took the bread that Jesus gave him and left the room.

A New Commandment to Love

After Judas had left, Jesus said: "I give you a New Commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. If you have love one for another then everyone will know that you are my disciples." (John 13:34-35)

Jesus had often spoken about love but the statement begins 'AS I HAVE LOVED YOU so you must love one another.' In giving this New Commandment Jesus laid the foundation of a group of people unique in human history. This group was identified by one thing - LOVE - no other factor such as race, gender, ethnicity or ability. During his time with them he taught about love, how to demonstrate love and how to give love. At the table he said he would be leaving them and the love he had poured into them must now be poured into each other. This New Commandment to love as Jesus loves: sacrificially, unconditionally, compassionately, selflessly and forgivingly was to make an impact on the whole world when, at Pentecost, the church was established and in the power of the Holy Spirit began its mission of spreading this love across the globe. "If you have love one for another then everyone will know that you are my disciples." I believe a re-examination of how we do express our love would be helpful in today's world. Maybe some discussion on this mandate or command will benefit us all.

Whilst still sitting at the table, Jesus continued his discourse (known as the Farewell Discourse chapters John 13-17) speaking to them about going away to the Father and sending the Holy Spirit to guide them. He was troubled as he knew the crucifixion lay ahead and told them "Do not be troubled, you believe in God believe also in me." Finally, he prays to his Father that "they may be one even as we are one" and that "the love with which you love them may be in them and I in them." These words of Jesus spoken at the Last Supper exemplify the New Commandment

So we can see the importance of Maundy Thursday. It is of absolute importance to the Christian Church being the prelude to Good Friday. It contains the culmination of Jesus' teaching to us all about his love and the life that he gave because of his love.