

Maundy Thursday in the time of COVID-19  
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St. Mark's Episcopal Church (via Zoom from quarantine)  
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It's no secret that I am a big fan of *Pride and Prejudice*. I've read the book probably five or six times, and I've seen several different film adaptations, including the storied six-hour BBC version which I try to watch once a year.

If you don't know the story, that's alright, because I am going to lift up one tiny vignette that is incredibly satisfying. A young woman, Miss Elizabeth Bennett, has been proposed to by a very silly man named Mr. Collins. Mr. Collins has a little bit of money, and Miss Bennett's mother thinks that Elizabeth should marry him. Elizabeth thinks she should NOT marry him, and mother and daughter get into a big fight. Mr. Bennett, the father, gets involved and is there to break up the fight between mother and daughter.

Mr. Bennett comes to his daughter and is about to make a proclamation. As an audience member, you have a feeling that he is going to force his daughter to marry the ridiculous Mr. Collins. But instead, Mr. Bennett tells his daughter that if she marries someone that ridiculous, he will never speak to her again.

It's a funny little scene that I've always liked. It's nice to see someone being ordered to do something they really wanted to do anyway. It's a bit like if someone came to me and ordered me to spend all day Saturday taking walks in the park and getting caught up on reading. That would be a command that would not be terribly hard to follow.

I was thinking about this in the context of Maundy Thursday. I say it every year but it bears repeating: Maundy means command, and this is the Gospel story where God commands us to love one another.

At the risk of losing my good Protestant credentials, I wonder if in a way we are being commanded to do something that is our joy to do. I think at some level, we really do want to live in a world where loving one another is the most normal thing in the world—where loving one another is simply the way that we do business with one another. I do think that somewhere in our heart is this urge toward love that Jesus is encouraging with his command. I see that urge played out every year when we gather to feast and sing and pray and wash one another's feet, something I know we are dearly missing this year and something that will return someday.

But unlike the stories and the church-y festivals, this love can also have some costs. Caring for a loved one who is infected by a terrible disease. Staying away from a beloved grandchild because it is safer for him or her. There are sacrifices that come with love, and it's not all just courtly manners and romantic endings.

But I like to think that, even when it becomes difficult, Jesus' command will ring in our souls. We will find ourselves emboldened by what he did with his disciples that night when he washed his feet and shared a meal with them for the last time before his crucifixion.

I know that we are accustomed to loving one another in a certain way—through a large meal together, ritual foot washing, sharing peace with one another, and living together as a community of support all in the same room. But those things aren't options right now. When I look at Jesus' command, though, I don't see any specifics. I don't see that we are supposed to love one another over at the church. It just says love one another, and that command doesn't go away because of a little thing like a global pandemic. We are supposed to do it anyway. Even when it is inconvenient, or difficult, or even costly.

Love is the command that we remember today. And it is a command I think most of us are glad to receive because it resonates with the love that we would like to give the world. But in this strange time, it will be up to us to figure out how we obey Jesus during this time of isolation. Maybe you need to make some calls, or donate some money, or stand in solidarity with an oppressed political group, or reconcile with someone in your family. I don't know what love looks like in your context. But I do know that just because we are isolated and not in church tonight, we are not off the hook.

*The Lord Jesus, after he had supped with his disciples and had washed their feet, said to them, "Do you know what I, your Lord and Master, have done to you? I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done."*

*Peace is my last gift to you, my own peace I now leave with you; peace which the world cannot give, I give to you.*

*I give you a new commandment: Love one another as I have loved you.*

*By this shall the world know that you are my disciples: That you have love for one another.*

—Book of Common Prayer p. 274-75

So, even though it is a strange time, it is still the day where God has commanded us to love one another—at a distance of 6 feet or maybe over the phone for now—but the command is the same. And the world will know that we are Christians by our love. Amen.