

**Maundy Thursday  
Holy Comforter Church  
The Rev. John E. Shields  
April 1, 2010**

**Maundy Thursday draws its odd name from ‘Mandatum novum’ i.e. new commandment ---- Mandatum = mandate  
Mandate: “A new commandment I give you, as I have loved you, love one another.”**

**Maundy Thursday is Mandate Thursday.**

**“As I have loved you, love one another.”**

**Love one another.**

**Jesus is commanding us to do it.**

**Love one another as I have loved you.**

**Love is a word that gets an awful lot of use in our vocabularies these days.**

**Concerning our modern use of the word Love, Paul Jones, a Roman Catholic priest writes these words ---**

**“Satan knows that subversion is a far better tactic than challenging Christians straight on with atheist parades or inflammatory banners. Since the heart of the gospel has to do with love, subverting Christianity is simple. Encourage everyone to fall in love with love. Surround them with fluffy bunnies and cute chickies for Easter and cuddly big-eyed children for Christmas. Make love a house hold word for everything – I love chocolate, or my Cadillac, or pickles, or God.**

**And when all kinds of love begin sounding the same, then we “make love” without loving. Church and society will be come so indistinguishable that folks won’t be able to tell the difference between “God is Love” and “Love is God.”**

**Advertising helps. Portray love as what proud parents feel when they gaze into a crib and see the future major league first baseman = in big-name brand shoes. A good ploy would be to render Jesus’ teachings more reasonable – with a string of handy qualifiers: love your enemies except ... love when ... love if ... love so that ... That will make unconditional love conditional – something earned rather than a gift, a nice feeling rather than an intention.**

**I would encourage folks to memorize the Ecclesiastes passage that is already a favorite, the one about there being a time for this and a time for that – a time for everything. “A time to love, and time to hate” That makes loves one part-time ingredient among many in the well-rounded person, not the full-time orientation through which the Christian knows when each other ingredient is appropriate. Then Christians will start feeling what the writer of that passage actually felt; “all is vanity and a striving after wind” – even love.”**

**Jones then says, “Then the Church can preach all it wants – it won’t matter. Love will have taken on the taste of Valentine’s Day candy and the smell of Mother’s Day flowers, joining mother and apple pie as America’s triune sentimentality.” (Weavings, Jan. ‘98.)**

**I think that Jesus must have known what a problem we would have with words. Maybe he knew that sometimes words just get in the way. So Jesus gets up from the supper and begins**

washing the disciples' feet. When he gets to Peter, this exchange occurs.

**Peter says, "You will never wash my feet."**

**Jesus replies, "Unless I wash you, you will have no share with me."**

**Unless you let me do this --- we will not be able to be in the relationship that we must have. In order to be my disciple, you must let me serve you.**

**Washing of feet was the task of a slave.**

**A form of self-giving sacrifice.**

**The very embodiment of humility.**

**Love one another, as I have loved you!**

**"You will never wash my feet."**

**"Unless I wash you, you will have no share with me."**

**(Jesus is saying that his followers must be willing to accept his servant role with them.)**

**Then he says, "*Do you know what I have done to you?*"**

***"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done to you."***

**King Oehmig says, "By this example of servant love the world will know that the disciples belong to Jesus. The enactment of the New Commandment makes manifest the core of Gospel**

values. From now on, after the foot washing event – the disciples will know that no act of love should be “beneath” them. They are never to be too proud, too above, too removed from cleaning dirty toes or washing dust off old calluses in the name of Jesus.” Synthesis, April 9, 1998

Will we let the Lord serve us?

Is it too much like giving up control to have someone serve us so unconditionally?

*“Do you know what I have done to you?”*

*“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done to you.”*

I think the reason we don’t like this --- it makes us uncomfortable --- is it’s just too real – too tangible. It doesn’t have to do with our intellect --- it is anti-intellectual.

It is too graphic --- let’s talk about foot washing --- Just what is it we want to accomplish?

Perhaps we could do a study and graph the responses – we could study the mean responses to the idea and graph to see what the upper and lower limits of ideas of acceptability were.

Our prayer then could go something like this --- O Lord, we have established the upper and lower control limits regarding the opinions of us your humble servant regarding what we think about foot washing and we present this to you, O Lord, knowing that you will appreciate our using our superior intellect to understand your commandment in a way that keeps us from bending over and embarrassing ourselves and our

**brothers and sisters who do not enjoy vulnerable, semi-Pentecostal feelings that actually doing this brings about.**

**We say “This is an archaic practice. It made sense when feet were the main mode of transport. It no longer applies in this day and time.”**

**Hardly the point,**

***“Do you know what I have done to you?”***

***“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done to you.”***

**An example of what true service and love is.**

**Mandate Thursday --- do this! I have given you an example --  
- love one another.**

**In the historical novel, *Ah, But your Land is Beautiful*, Alan Paton told the true story of a white South African judge named Jan Christiaan Oliver. A black pastor invited him to attend his church on Maundy Thursday. Given the facts of apartheid, the judge would be risking his career if he went, but meaning to be a good man, he accepted the invitation.**

**He learned on his arrival that it was a service of foot washing, and was urged to participate. He was called forward to wash the feet of a woman named Martha Fortuin, who as it happens, had been a servant in his own house for thirty years.**

**Kneeling at her feet, he was struck by how weary they looked from so many years of serving him. Greatly moved, he held her feet with gentle hands and kissed them. Martha fell to weeping,**

**as did many others in the room. The newspapers got word of it, and Oliver lost his political career. Perhaps he found his soul.**

**This night ----- Maundy Thursday --- we are brought by Jesus' command to the essence of his life and ministry among us.**

**We are given the feast that assures us of his presence among us when we gather. We are given the command to love one another, because it is the only way we will have the strength needed in this world to live faithfully. And we are given his example of discipleship. Humble service.**

**“This is my body, this is my blood.” Whenever you do this I am with you.**

**“Take Eat, not Take Understand!” C. S. Lewis**

**All that we need to understand is --- No service is too humble -- - humiliating for our Lord. We are to do likewise.**

**You can not stoop too low in the service of one another and our Lord. However, you can certainly rise above it and miss it all together.**