

“Following Love’s Command”

Today is Maundy Thursday. The Maundy comes from the Latin word *mandatum* which translates as commandment. For this is the day we remember that in the Gospel of John Jesus gave his disciples 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.”¹

In this time of COVID-19 we are besieged by commandments from doctors, the CDC, governors, and the president. We are to stay at home. We are only to make necessary trips such as to the grocery store or pharmacy. When we go out we are to stay six feet apart and wear masks. When we come home we are commanded to wash our hands thoroughly for at least twenty seconds while singing the Birthday Song to time our washing. We are not to touch our faces. We are to keep washing our hands. We are to disinfect anything we bring into the house, especially if someone else might have touched it. And we should wash out hands some more.

If we do all of those things then we are also to remember not to watch too much television, especially cable news programs which ramp up our anxieties. We should get out for a walk or other exercise, but be sure to wear a mask and keep your distance. Don’t forget to wash up when you come indoors. We should meditate, pray, or do some other practice that will help lower our anxiety. There are so many commandments that it is hard to remember and do them all.

Then tonight we get one more commandment and this one is from Jesus. Actually we received this commandment almost two thousand years ago. If we think about it for even a moment, we will realize that all of the commandments we have been receiving from governmental entities and medical professionals are subsumed under Jesus’ commandment.

When Jesus commands us to love one another as he has loved us he is not just telling us to be nice to one another. He is telling us to take care of one another. If that means wearing a mask to protect others from our coughs and sneezes, that is love. If it means washing our hands until they are chapped, that is love. If it means staying home and away from others in order to flatten the transmission curve, that is love. Whatever we are asked, or commanded, to do during this time of COVID-19 that protects friends, family, strangers and ourselves from infection and protects our communities and country from the rampant spread of the virus, that is love.

To follow Jesus’ commandment is not easy. Think of how hard it has been to follow the COVID-19 guidelines. It is because the commandments are

¹ John 13:35

not our norm. What we are asked to do to protect others and ourselves takes a change of patterns and a change of life. In this case we are only being asked to do a few, very discrete acts of love. When Jesus commands us to love one another he is telling us to turn our lives in a new direction. A direction where our lives become one ongoing act of selfless love for others. A life of service to one another. This does not mean that we become doormats or selfish martyrs, living to be downtrodden and relishing our misery. Rather it is out of our gratitude for God's love that we cannot help but serve one another as Jesus served people during his life and continues to serve us now, for his love is ongoing.

It may be hard to imagine this kind of love and selflessness, especially for 21st century Westerners. We are taught that the wealth of the world is ours for the taking. We are taught that whatever we want should be fulfilled instantly. If it is not, then we have been disrespected and deprived of our birthright. I know because I feel this way more often than I wish I did. That does not mean that I and we cannot overcome that feeling and that sense of entitlement.

That is what Jesus commands of us for the health of our souls and the world around us. We are to love, to do the lowest of jobs, such as washing others' dirty feet. When we are able to live in this way we are truly living into the *mandatum* of Maundy Thursday. As we do, we will find it becomes easier to do one more thing in love, and thus we keep growing in our selflessness as we shed our selfishness.

Let us all begin anew today to live into this love commandment so that, as Jesus said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, [because] you have love for one another."