

A new commandment I give to you: you shall wash your hands. That's been all over the news recently, health officials are encouraging us to wash our hands because there are germs everywhere. Wash your hands frequently, wash them for twenty seconds or more. Yet this isn't a new commandment, is it? All of us have known since preschool that we need to wash our hands. Washing your hands shouldn't be news.

We have gathered here on Maundy Thursday. And perhaps you'll be interested to know that the word Maundy comes from the Latin word "mandatum" which means "command." Tonight is command Thursday or Mandate Thursday. Which is this command? Jesus says, "**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another...**"

Yet what is Jesus talking about when He says, "new"? 1. (oops!) This commandment is hardly new. The Old Testament way back in Leviticus 19:18 tells us: "**...you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.**" This is hardly a new idea, Jesus. Are you stealing from the Old Testament? What about this do we not already know?

The fact of the matter is, we don't need one more thing to do. 2. (ugh!) As it is, we can hardly keep the commandments. This commandment seems to be yet another requirement for us to keep. One more rule to follow. This commandment is burdensome, isn't it?

Jesus continues, "**By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.**" If we love one another to show that we are His disciples, is the opposite true? A newspaper in Australia had the headline, "See how much they love each other!" The story was about one church suing another church.

This happened a year ago, but I still remember it. I went to an establishment and the employee was wearing a necklace that said in big letters, "I love Jesus." Yet he was the rudest, grumpiest employee that I've ever interacted with at this establishment. He certainly wasn't a good advertisement for Christianity. Likewise, it can be hard when we have loved ones who are devout Christians, but they are mean, impatient, and unloving. Things like that can shake our faith.

Last but not least, it can be a stumbling block to look in the mirror and see all the faults and foibles we have. We ourselves can be unloving. We can be impatient. Yes, even pastors. We sin much and often, and if it were up to us, we would have failed long ago. By our own devices, we can't keep any of the commandments, let alone this new commandment to love one another.

But what makes this commandment new? Let's go back to the words of Jesus. He says, "**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.**" 3. (Aha!) Jesus makes this new commandment new.

There were many heroes of the Old Testament: Abraham, Moses, and David. But they weren't perfect. They too were sinners: unloving, impatient, and unkind. But what the disciples had before them on this Maundy Thursday was the one perfect person: Jesus Christ. The one human who is full and perfect love. The emphasis is in this sentence is **“just as I have loved you.”** WHAT MAKES THIS COMMANDMENT NEW IS JESUS RENEWING US.

When Jesus gathered with the disciples in the upper room the night before He was betrayed, He didn't give them a task and then leave them on their own to accomplish it. He isn't a mother who tells her two-year-old son to clean up his room and not come out until it's spotless. He doesn't intend to give us an impossible task, but He did give us a task that requires His help and renewal every step of the way. The mom doesn't tell her toddler to clean something up all by themselves, the mom helps every step of the way.

4. (Whee!) Jesus' love renews us. Jesus' love isn't just the kind of love that is a good example or a heartwarming story. Jesus' love is the kind of love that makes us capable of loving others. Jesus demonstrated His love for us through His entire life. Being baptized in the Jordan when He didn't need to be cleansed. Resisting the devil in the wilderness. Ministering to the people He encountered: feeding them, healing them, and teaching them. He made Himself lowly, even washing His disciples' feet. He gives Himself to us in love as He feeds us with His very body and blood in the bread and wine of communion. After all, this is part of what we celebrate and commemorate on this Maundy Thursday evening.

Jesus' love drove Him to be arrested, to be falsely accused, beaten, whipped, and crucified. Jesus' love drove Him to save us. Jesus' love drove Him to forgive and purify us so that may be completely Holy, righteous, and loving in the sight of the Father.

Jesus' love drove Him out of the tomb because where there is love, there is life and where there is life, there is love. Resurrected, He will never leave us, but He alongside the Holy Spirit are our constant companions on the way. Helping us to love those who are unlovable and renewing us so that we too forgive others who wrong us. Christ renews you by killing your old, selfish self, and raising up a new person who delights in this new commandment and strives to fulfill it in as many ways possible.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” What beautiful words of Jesus in this passage. Indeed, how much more beautiful it is to know that we're not in it alone.

Finally, what does this look like? Especially in these times of quarantine. 5. (yeah!) Jesus shows us what love is. If we want to love one another just as Jesus

has loved us, we need to know how Jesus has loved us. First, let me talk about what that doesn't mean. To show the love of Jesus doesn't mean to be a doormat. To show the love of Jesus sometimes involves tough love and saying, "No."

Even when Jesus does the beautiful act of washing His disciples' feet, He in the same breath denounces Judas. **"Jesus said to him, 'The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.'"** Jesus rebukes the sinners and erring, and He isn't shy to do things like flip moneychangers' tables.

Sometimes love means having that conversation when your teenager was out until 2 a.m. that one night *so that* you can keep him out of trouble. Sometimes love means saying no to your adult son or daughter who wastes their money then comes asking you for help *so that* you can help them learn the value of self-reliance. Sometimes love means social distancing *so that* you don't spread disease.

Love also means knowing your limits and acknowledging that you aren't Jesus. Even Jesus Himself would retreat from the crowds and spend time in prayer. Make time to pray and do devotions because we know that true rest comes through Christ alone. Set realistic goals. During this time of quarantine, don't try to call everyone in your address book in a single day to check in with them. Give yourself time and space to recharge so that you aren't burned out. Don't overpromise. Put the oxygen mask on yourself before you help others do the same.

Second, what following this example of love does mean is that it gives us many beautiful chances for redemption and forgiveness. In this time of uncertainty be generous in your giving to church, to local food pantries, and to other charitable causes. Don't hoard supplies that others might need more than you.

Also, the point of Jesus washing feet is for us to be willing and able to do tasks that might seem beneath us. A winter's worth of dog droppings magically appeared on the church's lawn after the snow melted. A few days after I mentioned it to our small group Bible studies, those droppings also magically disappeared. Thoughtful and kind gifts will appear at the church's doorstep and on my desk from generous people. Faith Lutheran exists *because* people lovingly donate their time, talent, and treasures to this place.

And Faith Lutheran Church exists *to* share with all God's love through Christ and His promise of salvation. How beautiful it is on this Mandate Thursday to reflect on Jesus who empowers and renews us to do these loving acts for one another and for our neighbors and friends. Thank God that He gives us forgiveness when we fail to love others, and may Jesus grant us the ability by the power of the Holy Spirit to love one another just as He has loved us. Amen!