

“An Indescribable Gift”

Maundy Thursday

Jesus on Maundy Thursday shared His love with His first disciples and now with us. Covered by His forgiving love, we are heading to His cross as He suffers and dies for us. He hangs on the cross paying for our sins. But tonight, Maundy Thursday, He celebrates the Passover meal with His disciples and shares with them a new meaning of what is occurring.

St. John describes the first Maundy Thursday in John 13:1, *“Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”* Jesus had come into the world to go to the cross and it was almost time for Him to suffer and die. His hour had come!

Open to 1 Peter 1:3-4. St. Peter paints a picture of the glorious inheritance Jesus won for us Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter. Verses 3-4, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.”*

Tonight, as Jesus heads to the cross, we also see His love for His disciples as He shares Himself at the Table. So let’s look at ourselves as members of this congregation, believers in Jesus Christ sharing in the meal with Him and each other.

Even though His earthly life would soon be over, Jesus kept His focus on His mission. In Gethsemane’s garden He prayed earnestly, even pouring forth drops of blood. Jesus experienced the great emotion of fear and so He prayed, *“Father, if it be Your will take this cup from Me.”* Although He knew that great pain was coming, although He knew He was about to give His life as a ransom for all, and although a lesser person would have fled, Jesus kept His head focused. *“Not My will but Thine be done.”* That’s true love!

St. Peter reminds us, *“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.”* Love does cover a multitude of sins! Maundy Thursday evening, as our Savior instituted the Lord’s Supper, He said this meal was, *“Given and shed for the remission of sins.”* Have you ever heard of church people sinning, or have you ever been hurt by church people? Think of this another way, *“Have you ever hurt someone else in church? Have you ever sinned against a fellow church member in thought, word or deed? Because you and I sin, we’re desperately in need of forgiveness and having our grudges and guilt taken away!*

Our church is the place where we hear the forgiving love of God and we share His love with one another. Jesus said, *“This is my body, this is my blood shed for the remission of sins.”* You and I are part of His Body, and the recipients of this forgiveness, love and grace!

Open to John 13. Jesus not only instituted the Sacrament of His forgiveness, He also demonstrated His love in another way. Verses 3-5, *“Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.”*

Move to verses 15-17, *“For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a*

messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

Jesus's love is spoken in our congregation through our service to one another. Jesus's love is shared as our family gathers at His table for forgiveness. Let's continue to be faithful to this wonderful Maundy Thursday gift. When we speak to one another, let's speak as God would have us speak. When we serve, let's do it wherever there is a need and according to whatever abilities God's given us.

People today are very critical of the institutional church. They're not going to come to this church if they see us as unforgiving, uncaring and unloving to one another! As congregation members of this Body of Christ, we not only speak the pure teaching of God, but also show it by forgiving one another, caring for one another, and loving one another! Remember; don't tell me what a friend I have in Jesus until I see what a friend I have in you!

There's a church in Milan, Italy that was bombed out during WWII. All of the walls of the church fell down during the war except one. The only wall left standing has Leonardo Da Vinci's "Last Supper" painted on it. This Holy, fellowship meal we celebrate tonight will survive the chaos and changes in this world, to be celebrated again and again and ultimately in heaven with Jesus!

As we gather at the Lord's Table, Jesus is here! It's a time of reflection and a time of recommitment. It's a time of judging, not of each other, but of ourselves. When we gather at the Table, we gather together in unity. Think of the cross. The vertical beam shows our relationship with God and the horizontal beam shows our relationship with each other. As we come to the Table, we're in both relationships. As we stand side-by-side, we're saying we stand together in the one, true faith!

The Lord's Supper is a time to celebrate your hope for eternity. That's why as you leave the Table, you should leave with joy, with a smile on your face, because you've been filled with the Savior's presence, forgiven and renewed by His Body and Blood given and shed for you!

Dr. Thomas Troeger of Yale Divinity School once said, *"Every beat of your heart is an indescribable gift from God. Every beat of your heart is a grace from your Creator. Every beat of your heart is an occasion to stop trudging around with grudges and guilt and fear and instead thank God and love one another!"*

Every beat of your heart reminds you that Jesus loves you. Every beat heart inspires you to love each other as He loves you. Jesus's love's shown in Him giving Himself for you, a glorious indescribable gift!