

**Maundy Thursday**  
**April 6, 2023**

**Sermon by Rev. Renee LiaBraaten**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,  
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,  
And the power of God known in the Spirit. Amen.**

My friends, we have gathered here in this holy place, on this holy night, to remember how Jesus spent his last night with his disciples. In our Gospel reading we heard these beautiful and tender words, *“Having **loved** his own who were in the world, Jesus **loved** them to the end.”* During the season of Lent, we have heard these words each Sunday during the communion liturgy, and we will hear them once again tonight as we prepare to receive the sacrament.

In order to get a little more in touch with how Jesus may have been feeling on that first Maundy Thursday, I'd like to begin with a short, guided meditation. Now I know it is a little risky to ask you to close your eyes at this time of day--at the *beginning* of a sermon. But, it's much easier to meditate with our eyes closed, so please close your eyes for just a few moments.

Imagine that you learned this past month that you have only a short time to live. But, before you die, you have a chance, like Jesus, to arrange one last evening to spend with the people who are dearest to you.

Who do you want to be with you at this last gathering? Jesus loved his own to the end. Who are “your own?” Who are the people God has given you to love in this world? Just spend a few moments calling them to mind and holding them in your awareness.

Now, imagine all these loved ones gathered around you at a large table or in your living room. Take a moment to simply look at each of them. For a brief moment, savor the gift of each of these precious people in your life.

Now ask yourself: What do I want to say to them before I die? What do I want to express to them? What do I want them to remember about these last moments we have together?

Now let's open our eyes and come back together.

These are very intimate, deep, soul-searching questions, aren't they? I imagine these were the kind of questions that Jesus was thinking about as he prepared for this last supper with his disciples. And, as usual, there is much we can learn from Jesus about how to handle those final moments with those we love.

The first thing we learn is that Jesus, knowing that all hell was about to break loose, was not concerned for himself, but rather he was concerned for the ones he loved.

He knew what a jolt their faith was about to suffer, how vulnerable and frightened they would be, how his death would overwhelm them and lead them to despair. He wanted to prepare them, equip them, strengthen them, assure them that his love for them was stronger than the fear and doubt that would soon lead each of them to betray or desert him. He wanted them to remember that his love and his presence would not end with his physical death.

And so, at this last Seder meal that they would share, Jesus changed the ceremonial words that were typically spoken over the bread and wine. It is hard for us to appreciate how shocking this must have been to the disciples. They all knew the beloved words of the Seder by heart, just like we know the Lord's Prayer or the Apostle's Creed. When the bread was broken, these words were spoken: "We eat this unleavened bread to remember the night our ancestors fled in haste from Egypt..." But out of Jesus' mouth came unfamiliar and strange words: ***"Take and eat. This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me."***

And Jesus did the same thing with the wine. Instead of the traditional words calling to their remembrance the miraculous escape through the waters of the Red Sea, Jesus said, ***"Take and drink. This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."***

The disciples must have been so confused. In remembrance of Jesus? The Seder meal was all about remembering the Passover. What was he talking about?

And then, Jesus got up from the table and proceeded to wash each of the disciples' feet. This was another unexpected, perplexing experience for the disciples. It was an incredibly tender, intimate, unforgettable display of Jesus' deep love for them. In this foot washing, Jesus shared a personal, vulnerable, loving moment with each of his dear friends.

What a powerful and moving experience this must have been. We know that actions speak louder than words. And in this silent, gentle touching, washing and drying of the disciples' feet, Jesus was communicating to each of his disciples, "My **love** for you knows no bounds. Remember, nothing that is about to happen, nothing that you do or don't do, has the power to diminish or destroy my **love** for you. Nothing can separate you from my **love**."

So, the second thing we learn from Jesus is that in these last moments with his loved ones, he assured each of them of his **undying love** for them--that all was and would be forgiven. There would be no need to live with guilt or regrets.

And when he had finished, Jesus explained to them that just as he had washed their feet, he wanted them to wash one another's feet. "I give you a new commandment that you **love** one another. Just as I have **loved** you, you also are to **love** one another."

The washing of the disciples' feet is often interpreted as a symbolic sign of Jesus incredible servanthood, and as a call for us to serve one another. But Jesus doesn't say anything about **servicing** others on that last night. Maybe that's because serving others doesn't necessarily include **love**. Jesus was reminding his disciples, and tonight he is reminding us, that we are called to do more than **serve** one another. He wants us to **love** one another.

The thing to remember more than anything else about this night is the **call to love**.

It all started **with love**. "God so **loved** the world that he gave his only son..."

It was all **for love**. "Having **loved** his own who were in the world, Jesus **loved** them to the end."

It's all **about love**. "Just as I have **loved** you, you are to **love** one another."

We were made **by love**. And we were made **for love**. The reason God gave his only son was not sin. The reason for Jesus was **love**. On that first Maundy Thursday, Jesus taught us that it is always, only, ever, about **love**.

Please pray with me.

"Ah, holy Jesus, what language shall we borrow to thank you, our dearest Friend, for this your dying sorrow, your love that knew no end? Oh, make us yours forever, and should we fainting be, Lord, grant that we may never outlive our **love** for Thee. Amen.