**An Example of Love**

Based on [John 13:1-15, (34-35)](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn13.1-15)

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Holy (Maundy) Thursday ~ Mandatum

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Maundy Thursday is named after the Latin word “Mandatum” which means “Command”. In the appointed gospel reading, Jesus says “A new command I give to you, love one another as I have loved you”.

The command to love is not what is “new” in the new testament. What makes Jesus’ commandment “new” is the phrase “as I have loved you.” So what is Jesus saying? That his love is the example of love, the pattern that we are to imitate.

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus was in the upper room with his disciples and he washes their feet. And he says “For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.”

Love one another ***as I have loved you***. This foot washing is an example of what you should do, just ***as I have done to you.***

On the other hand, the holy supper of our Lord Jesus Christ...instituted that very night...was no no mere example of what we should do. It is what we are commanded to do. If it were an example, then maybe we--like some other churches take liberties to do--could offer grape juice or kool-aid instead of wine, or tortilla chips instead of bread. If the holy feast were simply an example of expressive art that communicates the meaning of the cross...then we might be free to express the cross in other ways...a tableau, a poetry slam, a stage play. But the Love Feast of the church, instituted by Christ is not merely an example of how one might choose to go about proclaiming the Lord’s death until he comes and receives through faith the forgiveness won. It is the real thing. It is it.

But Jesus washed the disciples feet as an example, merely an example, of bearing your brother’s burdens, of helping him in his bodily needs. Elsewhere the pharisees criticize the disciples for not ceremonially washing before they eat...and Jesus says “That’s just your tradition, don’t judge my apostles by your ceremonies.” Their washing did not really clean them, it was merely an example of how seriously they took the requirement to be ceremonially clean before God. But when they turned it into more than an example, more than an expression...when they turned their tradition of men into a command of God by which they will presume to separate the sheep from the goats and decide who is holy...that’s where Jesus corrects them.

Here, in this reading, Jesus starts his own tradition, foot washing. Even though Jesus started it, and even though Jesus is God, Jesus is also a man, and he starts a tradition of men. This is because foot washing is not in and of itself an impartation of love...it is an example, conditioned by the time and circumstances in which he lived. In first century palestine, foot washing was a thing to be done. Now we wear shoes. Foot washing It is an outward thing that does not indicate the disposition of the heart, nor what’s really going on spiritually, it can be more or less helpful to a person depending upon their circumstance. As Jesus means it, It is simply an example of something else, something that is really important. It is a reminder that love does not envy or boast, is not haughty or rude, it does not exalt itself...it is blue collar. Love does not come from a place of superiority or lordship Of all these aspects of love, foot washing...at least in Jesus’ time and place...was an example of such love. A wonderful, meaningful example, but merely example.

But the Holy Supper is not merely an example of God’s love, it is an imparting of it. It is his love given to you...his grace which is simply undeserved love. Jesus washes your feet, and the love is distinct from the removal of dirt from the body. But when he washes you in baptism, his love is the removal of sin for a clean conscience. The sacraments are not mere symbols, or reminders, or examples of something greater. The sacraments are the great things themselves. What is greater than an example of christ’s body and blood?...Christ’s true body and blood! What is greater than christ’s true body and blood?...nothing! For in that body he suffered the death that brings us life. By that blood, he shed his life for our life.

He who, by divine right, has the whole earth as his footstool...he stoops down next to that footstool to wash the feet of twelve mere mortal men. Ond one man remained dirty, even though his feet were cleaned. Judas was going to betray Jesus. When they supped, he dipped the bread in the cup and Satan entered him. This is not merely an “example” of how one can receive the grace of God in vain...it is the reality. He who does not believe, yet eats...eats and drinks judgment on himself. He who praises Christ while hiding idols under his cloak is condemned. Do not be deceived; God is not mocked. When you come to the supper with insincere hearts you are lying to the Holy Spirit, and--like annias and saphira--are walking straight into judgment from you cannot prevail. To secretly despise so great a salvation, and so awesomely humble of a mode of deliverance, is to withhold some proceeds from God...and he knows. He always knows. I do not want anyone who sincerely confesses Christ to flee from the sacrament, but the fact remains: if you do not fear the sacrament, you cannot truly love what it is and offers...the Divine Life of God Himself.

It offers forgiveness. It offers life. It delivers salvation to all who believe and partake, not of mere bread and wine, but of the true body and blood of Jesus Christ. There are people who believe that St Paul went to the third heaven, maybe even in the body!...and who believe that God created the earth in six literal days...who believe that Moses threw a log into a bitter pond and it made it sweet...who believe that a serpent and a donkey were able to speak like men...who believe a man could slay a thousand philistines with the jawbone of a donkey because he had long hair. But, when Jesus holds up bread and says “this is my body” they say “that can’t have happened. That he somehow united his body with the bread..I can’t believe that. I can believe that a man lived in the belly of a fish for three days, and that Jesus fed five thousand people with five barley loaves and two fish...sure I can. I know that with God all things are possible. But he can’t possibly mean what he says, that this bread is his body and this wine his blood.

In the same spirit, I suppose, Thomas said “unless I see with my eyes the nail marks and put my hand in his side I will never believe.” Those nail marks are where the body we eat was hung from for our salvation. That pierced side spilled the blood that we drink for our forgiveness. These are not merely examples of the sacrifice, they are the sacrificed body and blood. And if you believe body and blood can make real atonement for the sins of the world, then you can believe that body and blood can be eaten and drunk for the real forgiveness of sins. You can’t see the body under the bread, the blood under the wine...take heart...blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed.