

# Maundy Thursday 17th April 2025

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Date: 17 April 2025

Preacher: Helen Emery

[ 0 : 00 ] So, our Bible passage for this evening is from John chapter 13 verses 19-38 and we will watch it on the video.

! After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.

His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him.

Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, Ask him which one he means. Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.

Then, dipping the piece of bread, He gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.

[ 1 : 37 ] As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him, What you are about to do, do quickly.

But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charged the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor.

As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out, and it was night. When he was gone, Jesus said, Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in him.

If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. Jesus said, Yes. My children, I will be with you only a little longer.

You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now. Where I am going, you cannot come. A new command I give you, love one another.

[ 2 : 59 ] As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Simon Peter asked him, Lord, where are you going? Jesus replied, Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.

Peter asked, Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you. Then Jesus answered, Will you really lay down your life for me?

Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will disown me three times. Today is called Maundy Thursday. This evening, we're remembering the events of the night before Jesus was arrested, when he shared supper with his friends, who had been following him throughout his ministry of the previous few years.

Now, I incorrectly assumed that the word Maundy had something to do with mourning, like grief. But looking at the origins of the word, I was wrong, apparently.

[ 4 : 23 ] The word Maundy actually comes from the Latin Mandatum, like mandatory, something which must be obeyed, which refers to a command, a commission, or an authorisation.

We can see easily why today has become known as this, because in John, Jesus says, a new command I give you, love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another.

So today, I think, could be about remembering how Jesus led by example, the love he wants us to show to each other. He commanded us in this last act with his friends, that the bottom line is love one another.

He washed the disciples' feet, he served them bread and wine. He said that by doing likewise, by loving one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples. I really like the idea that this whole Christian faith thing can be distilled down to this one command, love one another.

It's beautifully simple. It echoes the answer Jesus gave when he was asked earlier in his ministry what the greatest commandment is. Jesus replied, love God and love your neighbour as yourself.

[ 5 : 43 ] Again, memorably, beautifully simple. And so, it would seem for Jesus that in the midst of whatever differences we might have, whether that's our varied personalities, our characters, our experiences, the diverse views we might hold between us on church life or theology or styles of worship or how we interpret the Bible and so on and so on.

If we simply love God and love one another, then all will be well. Sounds really straightforward, right? And in theory, it should be.

But if loving one another really is that simple, why does Jesus need to command his disciples and in turn us to do it?

You must love one another, says Jesus. So, why the need for this mandatum, this mandate from Jesus? Well, I think when we look at some of the behaviour of Jesus' disciples during the Last Supper and one aspect in particular, we can perhaps see why Jesus felt it necessary to insist on the need for them to love one another.

What is that one aspect that particularly stuck out to me? Well, it's the decision by one of Jesus' disciples to betray him to the authorities. So, this account of Jesus' Last Supper appears in all four of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

[ 7 : 18 ] And I find it interesting that each take a slightly different angle when they recount it. Each focuses on a different aspect of that evening.

But one element, which is the same in all four Gospels, is they all make the point of including this betrayal of Jesus. And that tells us it's a pretty important point, too important for any of the Gospel writers to consider leaving that bit out.

Now, we don't really use this word much, do we? Betray. We might relate more if we said, break a promise or letting somebody down or going behind somebody's back.

But the word betray suggests something stronger than any of those phrases. Betrayal cuts to the core of someone's relationship.

And in fact, this act of betrayal must have cut these disciples' relationship with Jesus and with each other to the core. Reading the different Gospel accounts made me think of the group dynamics between those disciples.

[ 8 : 27 ] They'd have a range of personalities, personalities that we can perhaps relate to. So there was the emotional, impetuous Peter, humble Andrew, ambitious James, practical Philip, inquisitive Thomas, analytical mathematician Matthew, passionate Simon.

They would have had, I imagine, all sorts of insecurities, egos, differences in outlook and opinions on how they thought this following Jesus stuff was all going to pan out.

They'd travelled together, they'd seen the most incredible miracles from Jesus and the highs and lows that they'd experienced would I imagine have brought them closer together.

And yet Jesus then goes and suggests that one of them is going to mess it all up and go against the group, let them all down. And rather than loving each other, things are going to go rather sour between them all.

It must have felt like it was all falling apart. Everything they'd gotten used to, hanging out together, learning, the hoping, the growing. One of them was going to give it all up, waste it all by favouring the authorities, the enemy.

[ 9 : 52 ] Such a sense of trauma, disappointment, loss. So the magnitude of this betrayal soon leads to the disciples turning on each other.

And again, what's interesting is that in each of the four Gospels, it includes the fact that this group of disciples were absolutely incredulous that Jesus could possibly be referring to them when he suggests that somebody is going to do the dirty.

So examples of how this is expressed in different translations or different paraphrases of the Bible include things like, it isn't me, is it?

Lord, who is it? Who's going to do such a thing? Surely you don't mean me. You can't mean me. I'm not the one. And so on. Seeing these responses is perhaps no wonder in the light of Judas' act of betrayal, the indignant, undignified infighting it caused amongst the disciples, Jesus then felt the need to remind them, to command them to love one another.

It's almost like Jesus is saying, look, of course there's going to be differences between you. Of course in a group of our size there'll be disappointments, denials, even betrayals.

[ 11 : 22 ] But don't let those differences, those disappointments define the way that you relate to one another. No, don't give up on each other. Instead, love one another.

Forgive, serve, because it's through the way you truly love one another that people will know that you're my disciples. I think, if we're honest, it doesn't take long for us to imagine Jesus sometimes needing to say words of this effect to us in certain elements of our lives today.

I know I can think of plenty examples in my experience when group dynamics have fallen apart and I'm sure that you can think of ones in your life too. And hear me out when I say that I can actually relate a bit to Judas here.

I, for one, can definitely be impatient to see things happen my way, to get things to happen on my terms, to be quick to take the easy route, to see a resolution, and to be part of the reason why things don't work out feeling great.

I wonder if that's sometimes maybe the case for you as well. So, in response to this reality, what might this command of Jesus to love one another look like for us in our lives, in our church?

[12:51] I've picked out a couple of areas we could perhaps think about. Firstly, I think it means we're called by Jesus to live with humility. None of the disciples thought it could be them that Jesus was talking about.

Surely you don't mean me. I guess it's the equivalent of those times when we get frustrated about something and assume that it's everyone else who is the problem, because it couldn't possibly be anything that we've done.

And yet, acting with humility means we're willing to at least ask the question of ourselves. Rather than, surely you don't mean me, we ask ourselves, could you mean me?

Maybe this level of self-examination stops us from feeling smug or indignant and instead keeps us humble and open to God's gentle, refining voice of love, which grows both our self-awareness and our awareness of God's Spirit working in our lives.

I can't help but think of the analogy that Jesus uses in Matthew 7 of the speck in the eye. So obstructing our view of the other person clearly, he suggests it might be a good idea to look at our own thoughts before we point out those in others.

[14:21] First take the blanket of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. Secondly, I think it also means we're called by Jesus to live with compassion.

When we try and see things from another person's perspective, when we try to work out why someone might see things differently to us, we're prompted to question our reaction to others close to us.

So whether in church circles or our families, with work colleagues, our friendship groups, when people have very different outlooks to us, maybe loving one another means we think twice before jumping to point out what someone else has done and focus on how we can act and react in a more gentle and kind way to be that little bit more tolerant.

I guess it teaches us that loving is about understanding each other and our differences too. And that comes with communication, trust, connection.

It's through humility and compassion that God enables us to grow in genuine love for one another. Not despite our differences, but because of our differences.

[16:00] God made us, and he loves us more than we can ever imagine with our individual personalities and characteristics. What a joy to experience community in such rich variety.

We're all shaped by our different experiences and interactions too. And how wonderful that God is with us in it all, shaping us as we grow closer to him.

It's because God loves us first that we can have this capacity to love others. And we don't have to do it alone. Through the Holy Spirit, we can find the strength needed to keep loving when things don't go as we planned.

So on this command to love Thursday, when we think about this final meal with the first group of Jesus' followers, perhaps we can consider how we might live as Jesus' followers here and now, loving each other and show that we're his disciples.

Tomorrow, we will remember Jesus' death, which shows the ultimate act of love, giving up his life for our sake. Then on Sunday, we'll remember his resurrection, which gives us the ultimate hope, the victory over the mistakes, the wrong and the hurt.

[17:38] Jesus has power over it all and we can live alongside each other, knowing that love, joy and peace are ours for the keeping because of him.

Amen. Amen.