

Mondatum Nuvum: A New Commandment

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Date: 21 April 2011

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[0 : 0 0] Let's pray. Father, open our hearts, Lord, so that we can hear your word. In Christ's name, Amen. Please grab a seat. Maundy Thursday. As you know, I'm sure many of you know, Maundy is from the Latin Mandatum Novum, which means a new commandment, which is referring to verse 34 here. A new commandment I give to you to love one another. A new commandment I give to you to love one another. I think without all the events that immediately preceded this commandment, Christ's directive to love each other wouldn't have been particularly earth shattering, I don't think. If they were just, you know, Christ and his disciples travel around a lot, right? If they were sort of traveling in between two towns and they're on the road and you know sometimes Christ had, you know, teaching moments with his disciples and if halfway through a day he'd have sat them down and said, listen team, I just think you should know that it's really important that you love each other because I love you and I've shown that and I think you should love each other and that would be a good thing to do. I mean

I think if it had happened like that, it would have been nice but not particularly earth shattering. In horse racing terms, I think in terms of Jesus' words it would have been an also ran, you know, like a no-brainer, like a of course, yes, you know, we think that as well, that's a really great idea. However, what makes this commandment a bombshell is the demonstration of what love looks like which immediately precedes this commandment. What does it mean to love like Christ? What does it mean to love like Jesus? Well, he demonstrates it in an incredible way at the beginning of chapter 13, which is the part of this reading which I just want to really zoom in on. So if you open up your Bibles again, page 900, we're looking at the first few verses here. It's that in the story of the gospel, we're at the point where Jesus has finished his public ministry and he's gathered his disciples together, like many times before, probably for a meal. And it's the last meal they'll have together. Well, I mean, it's the last supper, isn't it? I'm sure you've realized it's the last supper. And as I was studying this and reading these verses, they're very intimate, eh? It's very, very intimate. It's like we're peering in the window of some private function and we're overhearing a conversation that maybe we shouldn't. Sort of betrayal. It's very intimate. And if we were to peer in that window long enough to see what happened, we would see something extraordinary. We would see Christ assume the position of a slave and wash the feet of his disciples. Now, I'm sure you realize this. Culturally, foot washing was a normal thing. People would come to someone's house and a servant would wash your feet because, you know, folks wore sandals and the roads were dusty. And it's a nice thing to do. It honors your guests, etc. The slave does it. Never the host, never the master of the house.

That would be crazy. That would be completely inappropriate. It would be like if you were sitting on a bus and a heavily pregnant woman gave up her seat for a teenage boy, you know, and said, hey, listen, you probably are tired from playing computer games all day. You know, why don't you sit here? You know, I'm going to be lying down a lot in the next little while. So you take my, you know, that's just, that would be ridiculous, right? It would be unheard of.

It would be madness. And yet it is what Christ does. And why does he do this? I mean, that's the big question. Why? Well, on one level, on one level, what Jesus does is an example of how we should live. And, you know, I've already sort of mentioned this. We should live serving each other.

That's the natural meaning of this particular event. And it's, it's a great message. We need to know this, that the way of Christ is the way of service. It challenges our pride.

[5 : 1 1] It says that there is no task beneath us too unpleasant in the service of serving others. This is a very important gospel implication. You know, it's not easy. We should pray the Holy Spirit to help us do this. It forces us to ask the question, are we serving other people in our life?

Who are we serving? Who are we being Christ to? It's a good message. It's antithetical to popular culture. I don't know if you watch reality TV, but I've been thinking about reality TV recently. Reality TV is, it's a train wreck morally, you know. It's, it's, it's, it's one of those things you can't help but watch. It's like watching a car accident on the, on the freeway. Like, you don't want to look, but you, but you kind of do look, you know. Reality TV is all about, you know, a self-promotion and winning. And ironically, if you watch these shows, people become less human as they promote themselves as they degrade themselves morally and relationally. They end up less rather than more.

And this is not the way of Christ. The way of Christ is service. So on one level, that's what it means. But let's remember the context here.

Verse 34, a new commandment I give to you is to love one another like I have loved you. And how has he loved us? I mean, is it just foot washing? Is it just you should do unpleasant things to each other, uncomfortable things? You should do things which are beneath you to help each other out.

[7:01] Is it just that? No. No, there is much more to the foot washing going on here. There is a reason that John, who is the writer of this gospel, describes in very deliberate detail what happens.

I mean, he could have just said, and Jesus washed the disciples' feet and everybody was quite surprised by it. But no, he goes into a lot of detail. A lot of detail. And why does he do that? Well, it is because the act of foot washing is a parable of Christ's mission in the world.

Let's have a very quick look at it. Verse 4, he rose from supper, just as he has risen, just as he had risen from his heavenly throne. He lay aside his garment, just as he laid aside his heavenly glory and stepped out of heaven. He took a towel and wrapped it around his waist as a slave would. This is the incarnation. This is Jesus taking the form of a servant, becoming one of us. And in verse 5, he washes their feet as just on the cross. He washes our sins away.

And in verse 12, he puts his garment back on, resumes his place at the head of the table, just as Christ, after the resurrection, ascends, returns to heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

This is the big picture of Christ's saving work, dramatized in a very little story.

[8:44] Verse 34 again, A new commandment I give to you, that you will love one another, just as I loved you. You are also to love one another. I mean, the foot washing, that's a pretty awesome demonstration of what it means to love each other.

But more importantly, it points to the infinitely greater work of Christ, the infinitely greater demonstration of his love, his incarnation, his death, his resurrection, his ascension.

Okay, you with me so far, right? This is good stuff. Next point, though, because I have skipped over a piece of the foot washing scene, which is really important.

And that is the little bit of what we call in New Zealand, argy-bargy, the little bit of argy-bargy between Jesus and Peter. That little altercation. The cool thing about that little altercation is that it actually helps us understand communion.

Which is important to talk about on Maundy Thursday, because it's a big theme of Maundy Thursday. It doesn't come up so much in John 13, but in the other Gospels, it's where Christ institutes communion.

[10:02] So I want to talk a little bit about communion through this. Alright, so here's how we do that. So let's summarize the Peter and Jesus tiff.

So Peter reacts to the foot washing in verse 6, Lord, do you wash my feet? In fact, in the Greek, I think it's, he's so astonished that literally he's like, Lord, you, feet, my, you know.

And Jesus says, look, unless I do this, you can't be with me here. And so Peter, in his usual exuberance, says, well, if that's the case, then, you know, give me a whole bath.

And then Jesus responds with a very, very interesting line. So follow me here in verse 10. Jesus said to him, The one who is bathed, bathed, does not need to wash except for his feet, but is completely clean.

And you are clean. The one who is bathed does not need to wash except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean.

[11:16] Isn't that interesting? Isn't that odd? Like, it's kind of an odd thing to say. Now, the washing here is talking about the washing way of sins. The technical term for that is salvation.

Okay? And the Christian rite, R-I-T-E, for this, the Christian ceremony, which signifies this, is baptism. So baptism, it's a one-off thing.

Your sins are washed away. You are forgiven. Yes, that's true. It's a one-off thing. You cannot add to that. You cannot improve that.

You cannot improve what Jesus has done. It's like trying to improve a U-turn by turning again. You know, it's like turning 360 degrees instead of 180.

You haven't helped your situation. You've actually just harmed it. Okay? So baptism, in terms of how it relates to the old covenant, is like, they would circumcise little boys, right?

[12 : 13] And that was like the sign that you're part of God's people, part of God's family. And that's a one, you don't do that twice, right? That's a one-off thing. And baptism in the new covenant is like the new welcoming into the family of God.

Does that make sense? This is easy, eh? This is good stuff. Alright, okay. The one who's been bathed does not need to wash. They're completely clean.

Salvation. Baptism. Yeah? Okay. Alright. Now, I've missed a little bit here. The one who's been bathed does not need to wash. It's completely clean except for his feet.

What? What is that about? Well, we might be clean. And I'm sort of finishing up here. We might be clean. But we are walking on dusty roads in this world, aren't we?

We are walking on dusty roads. I think what Christ is talking about here is our ongoing need for forgiveness. A life of continual repentance.

[13 : 25] And if the bath is, you know, baptism, salvation, or the one-off forever thing, the foot washing is symbolized in communion. This ongoing, often repeated act of remembrance and repentance.

And it's, we need it desperately because our feet, you know, our feet get dirty. Okay, let's tie this up here. Mandatum novum, a new commandment.

Given what we've learned about what love looks like in this passage, and this, all in the midst of betrayal. Given what we've learned about what love looks like in the midst of betrayal, in the midst of the drama of this situation, given that, this commandment to love one another is not trite, it's not a small thing.

It's not a, you know, let's, we're all Christians, let's hold hands and, you know, give each other fun nicknames and hang out a bit. You know, it's, it's, no, it's radical. It's mind-bending. It shatters our pride.

It's completely counter-cultural. It's an upside-down way of looking at the world and our place in it. And how do we get there? How do we get this, how do we get this way of living into our hearts?

[14 : 50] Well, first, we need to be saved. We need to, we need to see what Christ has done for us. We need to believe that, that, that he has died for us, that he has risen again.

And we need to get baptized. Secondly, we need to keep coming back to Jesus. We keep coming back to Jesus, and this is not a word, but re-comprehending what Christ has done for us.

Weekly, daily, privately, in a community, in communion. And if we do this, the Holy Spirit re-orientes our hearts so that we can be more like Christ.

And we can learn to love like he has loved us. Amen? Amen.