

Maundy Thursday  
March 29, 2018  
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Exodus 12:1-14  
Psalm 116:1, 10-17  
1 Corinthians 11:23-26  
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Today is called “Maundy Thursday.” That’s not a word widely used outside a church calendar these days, but it does still gets recalled in some places.

Going back to the reign of King John I, English royalty have “kept their maundy” on this day, marking it with an act of charity somewhere within their realm. Once upon a time, kings (and the occasional queen) followed both the commandment and the example of Jesus by getting down on their knees to wash the feet of one or more of their subjects.

It’s somewhat less profoundly observed these days, but it still makes the news. Queen Elizabeth observed the day at St. George’s Chapel at Windsor Castle (where Prince Harry and Meghan Markle will get married in May). She turns 92 this year, so she handed small purses, with “Maundy Money” in them, to 92 men and 92 women – pensioners chosen for their service to the church and their community. <sup>i</sup>



It costs her so very little, either financially or in terms of pride – and nothing at all in terms of privilege – though I suppose there may yet be some value in reminding a head of state that she is obliged to care for those ruled:

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.  
Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.*

I want to say more about the commandment to love. But before I do, I also note that there is something else Jesus gave us on Maundy Thursday. We also recall the meal he gave us.

It was his “last supper” with his disciples. We think of it as when he instituted a sacramental meal we have continued down through the centuries. St. Paul recalled that night, and the words Jesus gave us, in our reading this night from 1 Corinthians. Jesus took bread, and said:

*This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.*

And Jesus told his disciples to share a common cup:

*Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.*

Jesus told his disciples to share this sacred meal with one another in his name, even as he told them to love one another in his name as well.

The two gifts, the two commandments, are really inextricably linked. For as long as Jesus was with the disciples, he shared meals with his disciples and others. It was just about the best example of God’s love they could hope for. In Jesus, they could see God’s love. In Jesus, they could experience God’s love for themselves. And on the night before his death, Jesus says, in essence, that since he will no longer be able to do that for them, to *be* that for them, they will need to do that – they will need to *be* that – for one another.

We still share a sacramental meal in remembrance of that experience; we still do so to *re-member* the love of God Jesus’ disciples first glimpsed in the Word made flesh.

That doesn’t mean it doesn’t happen outside of our liturgical practices, of course. It doesn’t mean that church is the only place God’s love is experienced. I am reminded of a story that makes the rounds and gets passed on, so it may be one you’ve heard before.

Once upon a time, ... a little boy set out one day on a journey to meet God.

He figured it must be a long trip to where God lived, so he packed his suitcase with Twinkies and a six-pack of root beer, and he started on his journey. When he had gone about three blocks, he met an old woman. She was sitting in the park, just staring at some pigeons. The boy sat down next to her and opened his suitcase. He was about to take a drink from his root beer when he noticed that the old lady looked hungry so he offered her a Twinkie. She gratefully accepted it and smiled at him.

Her smile was so pretty that the boy wanted to see it again, so he offered her a root beer. Once again, she smiled at him.

The boy was delighted!

They never said a word, but they sat there all afternoon eating and smiling. As it began to grow late, the boy realized how tired he was and he got up to leave, but before he had gone more than a few steps, he turned around, ran back to the old woman and gave her a hug. And she ... she gave him her biggest, most radiant smile of all.

When the boy opened the door to his own house a short time later, his mother was surprised by the look of joy on his face. She asked him, "What did you do today that made you so happy?"

He replied, "I had lunch with God." And before his mother could respond, he added, "You know what? She's got the most beautiful smile I've ever seen!"

Meanwhile, the old woman, also radiant with joy, returned to her home. Her son was stunned by the look of peace on her face and he asked, "Mother, what did you do that made you so happy?" She replied, "I ate Twinkies in the park with God." And before her son could respond, she added, "You know, he's much younger than I expected!"

Whether it ever happened or not, it's a true story, if only in the sense that it speaks of a truth deeper than facts. There's nothing in the admonition of Jesus to love one another and to share meals that remember his love for us that says we can never experience the love of God in less formal, less ceremonial, less liturgical ways. That's the truth of the story about the boy and his Twinkies and root beer, as I hear it ... that God's love *can* be experienced in a random meeting between strangers.

But just because God's love *can* be experienced in a random meeting between strangers, doesn't mean that it *will* be experienced in such chance encounters. And that's the truth beneath Jesus' twin commandments. And that's why the followers of Jesus are commanded to share the meal and to share the love.

The sobering truth of it all is that while the love of God *can* be a part of the meals we share with one another – sometimes without our even trying – all too often, it doesn't happen that way. And at least part of the reason why it does not happen is that it *need not* happen.

So Jesus tells us that it falls to us to do what we can to make it happen every time we gather. Every time we break the holy bread, every time we drink from the holy wine, we are drawn back to that meal he shared with his disciples on the night of his betrayal. And as we are drawn back to that night, we are told to re-*member* – by our words and actions – the death and the life ... *and the love* ... of Jesus with his disciples. Every time we break the holy bread, every time we drink from the holy wine, we are commanded to love one another with the holy love of God.

It isn't Twinkies and a root beer, but it's still pretty good. And it's still a good bet that if we, like the little boy in the story, have set out on a journey to meet God, then God will be a part of all our meals together.

And you know, both the little boy and the older woman were right: God is much younger than we expected ... God is much younger, much more alive, more vibrant, than we expected... and she will bless us with the most beautiful, radiant smile imaginable, if we (when we sit down to eat our meal) take the time to turn aside to look.

There is, in fact, much about God that we never noticed before, mostly because we simply forget to look and see. And so, for that reason, we are gathered here this night in Holy Week and told, once more:

*Eat this bread ... in remembrance of me;*

*Drink this cup ... for the remembrance of me;*

*Love one another ... to re-member me.*

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<sup>1</sup> Stephanie Linning for *MailOnline* @ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-5557799/The-Queen-gives-92-men-92-women-traditional-Maundy-Thursday-coins.html>.