

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

By the time most of you hear this, it will be Thursday — Holy Thursday it's called, or also Maundy Thursday. Most of you also know that that name, Maundy, comes from the Latin word *mandatum*—commandment, and that this day is called that because on that Thursday night when Jesus was betrayed, Jesus gave to His disciples “*a new commandment*”: “*A new commandment I give to you,*” a *mandatum novum*. But as we'll see, not just one.

This Maundy Thursday has a bit of extra significance for me this year. Our Beth Ann was asking me about it. She was concerned because, she told me, her pastor “was considering dropping Maundy Thursday service because they are not Lutheran.” She had never heard of such a thing, and well, neither had I.

It's an interesting assertion since a Church Order of Martin Chemnitz and Jacob Andrea (*Church Order for Braunschweig-Wolfenbuettel*), whose Lutheran *bona fides* are unquestioned, included “The Feast of the Lord's Supper, which is called, Maundy Thursday” under the heading “Special Festivals or Feast Days to Be Kept During the Year” (thanks to John Pless for that reference).

What made it “not Lutheran” according to this pastor, I asked? She didn't know; he hadn't said. I still don't know, but I can imagine a couple of possibilities.

One, some Christians get mixed up with what the command is that Jesus gives, and so they think that they must do foot-washing ceremonies, that these really ought to be an ordinance that the church is to keep. But I submit that Jesus did this as “*an example*” of loving service, not something for the church to keep as an ongoing ordinance, as the pope does, or as Anabaptists and Pentecostals do.

No, Jesus doesn't identify “washing feet” as the *mandatum novum*, but rather love: “*that you love one another.*” Love is the command of Christ. He repeats the command: “*just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*” St. Paul repeats this command, too: “*Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ... love is the fulfilling of the law*” (Rom. 13:8, 10).

Of course, we know how Jesus loved us. He expressed the greatest love one can do for another by laying down His life for us, for the world. This is the love His disciples are also called to — to think not first to oneself, but to your neighbor (Matt. 22:39), to offer up your bodies as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1). St. Paul fleshes this love out a bit: “*Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.*”

*Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality” (Rom. 12:9-13).*

That's so all the time, but especially in this health crisis; we need to be seeking to find ways to show this kind of love, especially to our Zion “*saints*,” but at the same time not expecting any reward for it — remember, we're Lutheran. We do these things because we are followers of Christ, as Jesus Himself taught, “*when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty’*” (Luke 17:10).

The second reason I think a pastor might consider this day “not Lutheran” is because some years back, it became common for Lutherans to try to recreate a Jewish Passover seder — a Passover meal. After all, our text begins on that Thursday “*before the Feast of the Passover*,” but it moves quickly to the supper, the Passover meal. So the context certainly is a Passover meal, but it's not Lutheran, it's not even Christian, to celebrate a Passover meal.

Rather, “*after [the] supper*,” Jesus gave a command to do something new—another a *mandatum novum*, if you will? “*This do*,” Jesus said. It's an imperative! And what shall we do? Take bread and, by adding His instituting words to it, receive not only bread but Jesus' body. “*This do*.” Again, combined with His instituting words, this cup becomes the “*the new covenant in my blood*,” or as we say it when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, “the new testament” in Jesus' blood. In other words, this command brings grace. This is a command with a promise, and that makes this eating and drinking a sacrament.

And so, the church has been “doing this” from the beginning and ever since, not washing feet, but gathering together to devote ourselves to the Apostles' teaching on Jesus and to partake of the Holy Communion, eating the fruit of Christ's sacrifice, His body and His blood, nourishing “our weak souls that they may flourish” (LSB617:1), that our faith in the Lord might be strengthened and that our love for one another might be made ever more fervent.

Yes, Christ really gave two commandments on the night when He was betrayed. The first was a command with a promise: “*This do. Eat my body and drink my blood. It's my promise to you of a food that endures to eternal life. It's my promise to be with you, strengthening you in faith and in love*.” The second was to love one another as He loved us. As Christians, may we strive to do this also, and in our striving and in our failure return to Christ and His promise in the first.

Indeed, “Lord, may we eat this supper often, that we may strive to keep your *mandatum novum* to love.” It's the Lutheran thing to do.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.