

Exodus 12:14, John 13:31-35

“The new covenant”

When Stacy and I moved to Italy to begin our work at the orphanage in 1994 at the young age of 25, the chaplain who was there before us gave us some advice. She had been in the ministry as a pastor for about 3 years and she said the hardest thing here is to come up with something to say every Sunday. After a while you run out of things to say. Well, I have to say that anyone who said every Sunday it is difficult to come up with something new and different, well, that may be true if you are a content creator.

But for me it has been 32 years and every week I so look forward to beginning with a Scripture and seeing what that Scripture through the Holy Spirit might teach me and produce some insight that I may be able to pass on to you. I so look forward to sharing with you what I have learned, even from this Scripture that this evening I have looked at almost every year for the last 32 years. I wonder what will God teach me to share with you about Jesus and his disciples on Maundy Thursday?

Maundy Thursday is a time to reflect upon Jesus and his disciples and the actual institution of the Lord's Supper. It is from this evening that we get the sacrament of communion. But what we find this evening for Jesus and his disciples is that reflection is not enough, but it has to turn into action as we see both here in Jesus' new command and the command that we have in Exodus. Let's read

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We have to begin by stating the obvious to some of us, but for those of us who are new at this, the basic fundamental fact that the Lord's Supper is a continuation and addition to the Passover. We find ourselves this evening with Jesus and his disciples as they were gathered together to take the Passover meal in an upper room. It went something like this, we find it in Matthew 26:17-19.

So what was the Passover celebration? Well, this is where we have to go back to our Exodus Scripture. Again, if you are new at this, we need to know what happened on the Passover. Moses is with Pharaoh and demanding what God demanded, which was to let his people go as they were slaves in Egypt. Pharaoh refuses and God sends 9 plagues to help convince him and to show his might to the people of Israel and of Egypt. Pharaoh continues to refuse so God sends the 10th plague which is the angel of death which would Passover Egypt and

those who do not have the blood of the lamb on the doorposts, the angel of death would strike their eldest son.

The Israelites are warned of this by Pharaoh and so they put the blood over their door posts, they are told to get ready to leave in haste, to not put leaven in their bread because they would have to leave Egypt before the bread would rise, and sleep with sandals on your feet because when we are told to go, you have to go. The angel of death passes over, Pharaoh's oldest son is killed, he calls Moses in and tell him to leave right now, and if he delays he will change his mind, and the people of Israel leave. God saves the people of Israel and so this Passover celebration we are told was to be immortalized forever, according to the Scripture that we read. We see this old commandments that we are to celebrate God's deliverance of Israel every year in the Passover. Always remember, this, never forget.

Thousands of years later Jesus and his disciples gather to remember this event in the Passover, a celebration that saw Jerusalem swell with pilgrims coming into the city to celebrate this great event. They are fulfilling this commandment of Exodus to remember this event and they are doing so in a meal that Jews call the Seder meal.

The context in which Jesus gives this new commandment, that compliments the commandment to eat this meal in memory of the deliverance from Israel, is that we read in I Corinthians 11, let's read that, do this in memory of me. Jesus says at the Passover do this in memory of me. This institution of the Lord's supper in I Corinthians allows us to hear the same words of Exodus that we are to do this and remember what Jesus did with his disciples. This is what we are doing this evening, here and now. Just like the Exodus Scripture, do this forever.

But Jesus also says that I leave you with a new commandment, which was more than just eat this meal in memory of me. He says basically don't just remember what God has done, this new commandment tells us to act on what God has done for us and so we ought to do to others, as God has done for us. What has God done for us, he has loved us. Jesus in these verses not only tell us what to do, love one another, but he shows us as well earlier by washing the disciple's feet.

Jesus later in John 15:12-13 describes the commandment again, this new commandment in an entirely new way. Maundy Thursday has to be seen in the light of Jesus' impending death. Death is not a punishment but rather Jesus' obedience. Jesus chose to empty himself even to the point of dying on a cross, it was his choice. This was his choice to love us in this way. Just as

the Egyptians were freed from their bondage to Pharaoh, so we have been freed from our bondage to sin through the death of Jesus, a death he chose for us.

What we do around this table is more than nostalgia. We believe in the real spiritual presence of Jesus in our midst around this table and in this room when we take part in this sacrament. We aren't just remembering with a warm fuzzy feeling, we are experiencing the real presence of Jesus. We believe we are called to this new commandment of loving one another both inside and outside these walls. This is how followers of Jesus ought to be know, they love people. This new commandment should be our way of life. Amen.