

St. Columba's Episcopal Church  
April 2, 2026 – Maundy Thursday  
Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35  
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Our first lesson from the book of Exodus describes God's instructions to the Jewish people for keeping the festival of Passover. We read it on Maundy Thursday because it orients us to what is about to take place on Good Friday – a sacrifice. Not the sacrifice of a lamb, but of a sinless man, Jesus, the Messiah. Not the unwilling sacrifice of a dumb animal, but the willing sacrifice of the Son of God, the Lamb of God. As the priest says when the bread of the Eucharist is broken, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us."

Jesus knows that his death is imminent, that he is alone with his disciples for the last time. This is a time for total clarity, a time for Jesus to do and say what his disciples will remember and pass on to other followers of Jesus, to us. We all know the expression "actions speak louder than words." This afternoon we remember what Jesus did on the last night of his life, what he showed his disciples to do. His words were brief. His actions were unforgettable.

In our lesson from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians we read what are referred to as "the words of institution," the basis of all Christian rituals of the Last Supper. Simple actions. Brief explanations. Jesus took bread, gave thanks to God, broke the bread, and shared it with his friends. He said a few words: "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Then Jesus took the cup of wine, gave thanks to God, and shared the wine with his friends. He said a few words: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." Simple actions. Brief explanations. And a command for his followers: to do what Jesus did that evening in remembrance of him.

This concept of remembrance is deep. As we understand it in the Anglican tradition, remembrance is much more than merely recalling an event of the past. It is incorporating the event, participating in the event, becoming the event. In the church we refer to ourselves collectively as the body of Christ, and each one of us is a member of the body of Christ. Our participation in the Holy Eucharist signifies our willingness to be broken and poured out to show the world the love of God, as Jesus did.

On the last night of his life Jesus also taught his disciples about love by washing their feet. Jesus knew that soon he would be betrayed by one of his closest friends and followers and that he would lose his life. John writes of Jesus, "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13:1b). And this is how Jesus showed his love. He washed his disciples' feet and explained what he had done, so that there would be no misunderstanding. Jesus showed his followers, one more time, how the love of God is revealed in human interaction. He had given them a lesson in humility and service and instructed them to follow his example.

This is Maundy Thursday. “Maundy” is an unusual word. The root of the word is the Latin word “*mandatum*,” which means “command.” The English word we are most familiar with that comes from the same root is the word “mandate,” an authoritative command or instruction. The immediate reference that the word “Maundy” points to is the conclusion of the passage from the Gospel of John that we just heard, when Jesus says, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” We must always remember that Jesus said, “If you know these things” – these things pertaining to God’s love – “If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.”

Jesus invites us to love as he loved, and this means self-giving love. We have all sinned, but we have also all loved with self-giving love. We have loved God. We have loved other people, our neighbors as ourselves. We have loved and cared for God’s good creation. We have loved the church. Each of us has our own unique history of self-giving love. I would suggest that you think about what you have done in the past and what you are doing now to glorify God and follow Jesus, to love as we are called to love. For what you have done and what you are doing now, give thanks to God for God’s grace and help. I would also suggest that you think and pray about what God may be calling you to do in the future – tomorrow, next month, next year – to glorify God and follow Jesus. Pray for the help of the Holy Spirit as you continue to “walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2).

We have gathered here today because God has called us to follow Jesus. On this very special day in the church year, we have remembered our Lord’s words and actions – serving others, giving thanks to God, commanding his followers to love others as he loved them – even to the end of his life. We have been given the opportunity to learn about God’s love from the words and actions of our Teacher.

I pray that what we hear and do today will help us to know and receive the love of God more deeply. I pray that what we hear and do today will strengthen our love for Jesus and guide our love for one another, in the name of our Savior. Amen.