

“We Are Plan A”
Maundy Thursday, April 17, 2025
1 Corinthians 11:23-26
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

In the name of the one who taught us that we are loved and who taught us how to love. *Amen.*

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another (John 13:34).

Our Episcopal church is driven by scripture, tradition, and reason. And this evening we will embrace all three foundations of the church. This service is bookended by Scripture. We have heard the lessons and Gospel for Maundy Thursday. And at the end of our liturgy we will go to the garden of Gethsemane with our Lord as we hear from Matthew’s Gospel, and we will hear our Lord’s cries of anguish in Psalm 22 as we carry out our ancient tradition of stripping the altar.

Tonight as is our custom, we have removed the purple hangings of Lent and the red paraments of the Passion and have dressed the altar in white to commemorate the first Eucharist that Paul writes of to the people of Corinth. And again, for the last time this week, we will hear Christ’s words of institution from the very first Eucharistic meal at his last Passover with his disciples, disciples he had loved so well, disciples that he had taught how to love. And then, we will remove all traces of Christ from our sanctuary. All consecrated vessels will be put away. The Word will be removed from the lectern. Sacred music will leave the organ. All the linens will be stripped and the altar will be washed down so that no trace of the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ will be here. We will douse the sanctuary light because even all reserved sacrament will be consumed. Our Lord will not be here.

Now, our reason tells us that our he will continue to hear us when we cry – for the hungry will be fed, the weak will find strength, and the chains of the oppressed will be broken. Our Lord’s loving acts of servant ministry and saving deeds will continue in his absence. But only because of our love for those who need us.

I had a wonderful opportunity to see a Salvador Dali’s masterpiece – Christ of St. John of the Cross. I saw it hanging in the St. Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art beside Glasgow Cathedral on my only trip to Scotland. The painting shows an extraordinary view of Christ’s crucifixion from above. I was so impressed with the Dali painting not for its unique perspective, but because the Lord’s body was whole. The preview of his resurrection was so enthralling that I could not tear myself from it, and the curators had to ask me to leave after they had already locked the doors of the exhibit. We know that our Lord will return to us. And we know that he will be whole. And we trust that in the three days before his resurrection his loving work of servant ministry will go on. But for the next three days he will not be here.

There is a story of Christ’s arrival in heaven where an angel had long awaited him. This angel had been puzzling over a question for a long time. He told our Lord that he knew that Jesus had entrusted God’s good work to the disciples. And Jesus’s followers were to carry on his work on earth. But the angel asked “What if they don’t do it?” Jesus said: “There is no Plan B.”

My friends, Jesus’s disciples turned apostles and all his 1st century followers were Plan A. And now we are Plan A. Christ’s work continues. While he is not here in the church for these three days – that are called the Triduum – his love remains.

Jesus gave us a new commandment, that we love one another. Just as he has loved us, we also should love one another. By this everyone will know that we are his disciples, if we have love for one another.

The English word Maundy comes from Middle English *maunde* and Old French *mandé* ultimately derived from the Latin *mandatum* – meaning to command. Jesus gave them and us a new commandment. He said “a new commandment I give you, that you love one another as I have loved you.” But first, Jesus gave the disciples an extraordinary example of the sort of love he was speaking of – he washed their feet. He washed their dusty dirty feet. Peter balked at his overwhelming gesture of love. And even when Jesus explained, Peter wanted all of himself to be cleansed. And Jesus told him that he already was clean.

We may wonder if Judas was likewise cleansed. All the disciples were there. So Judas was there. And Jesus’s act of love included even Judas.

Not all people are willing to accept Jesus’s love. We are called to love all God’s people. Does that include others that we might prefer to forget? Absolutely! We are to love one another as Jesus loves us.

There is no Plan B, my friends. We are it. We have to live into Christ’s new commandment. May we too continue to love better as we carry out Plan A.

In the name of the one who taught us that we are loved and who taught us how to love. **Amen.**