



## Purple Theory: Holy Thursday (Maundy Thursday) Love One Another | Scripture: John 13:1-17, 31b-35

### COVID-19 Recommendations

As we continue to accommodate our practices due to the COVID-19 pandemic, if you choose to celebrate Communion on Maundy Thursday, please do so online or how ever your church's reopening plan stipulates for the health and safety of all. Do not host a traditional foot washing service where people will have to be within six feet of each other and/or touching. Alternative ideas include:

- Hosting an online service and asking worshipers to take turns washing the feet of those in their household, (or in the case of worshipers who live alone to wash their own feet and visualize Jesus washing them).
- Consider inviting worshipers to prepare a simple meal at home and join together "around the table" to eat their meal during the service.
- Because Holy Thursday celebrates the intimacy of Jesus and his disciples breaking bread together and washing each other's feet, consider hosting a more conversational service, with breakout (small group) rooms if necessary, depending on the number of worshipers.
- Holy Thursday is all about loving one another, hospitality, and service. Consider providing an at-home worship kit with a meditation/prayer and asking people to engage in a safe, socially distanced act of service (specified by you, or of their choice) instead of a worship service.
- Encourage your congregation to use Holy Week as a time to consider the needs of others and use worship gathering to lift up these acts of humility.

Please feel free to mix, match and adapt elements from this resource to design a service that works for your congregation. The resource is *not* designed to be read from beginning to end.

### Call to Worship

Jesus invites you to set aside some time with him today.

**We say yes to the invitation. We come into his presence.**

Jesus calls you to the dinner table; the God of all offers to serve you!

**We are in awe that you, Lord, serve us and crouch low to wash our feet.**

Jesus has a word of love for you. Will you listen?

**Spirit, soften our hearts to hear this message of love.**

### Unison Prayer

**God of love, we thank you for making room for us at your table, as you did for your disciples years ago. As we remember the last supper you shared with them, help us to embody the generous and humble spirit you taught your followers on that day.**



**Scripture: John 13:1-17, 31b-35**

## Message

### Introduction

Holy Thursday or Maundy Thursday remembers:

- Jesus' celebrating the last meal he shared with his disciples before his crucifixion at which he instituted Communion as a sacrament
- The new commandment Jesus gave before he was crucified, "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). The Latin for "new commandment" is "mandatum novum." The word "maundy" comes from "mandatum"
- Jesus giving an example of this new commandment through washing the feet of his disciples

### Key points

We often think of spiritual disciplines as "between me and God," but Jesus' example here shows that a key part of our faith is outward; it is about the willingness to receive and give love by serving one other.

Simon Peter represents many of us in different ways. He is shocked that Jesus, his Lord, would wash his feet (instead of the other way around). But as soon as Jesus tells him, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me," (v. 8b) Simon Peter wants Jesus to wash his hands and head too! Simon Peter is eager to do things the "right" way, to check all the boxes, to guarantee his place with Jesus. But Jesus refocuses Simon Peter. Holiness is not just about being "clean" and not doing anything wrong. It is more about loving and serving others.

This same kind of intimacy, humility and love that occurs here by foot washing is also present around the Communion table, where we bring our brokenness to God in the presence of others, share together in the blood and body of Christ through bread and cup, and partake knowing that we live by grace alone. By extension, we are given grace to love and accept one another, flaws and all.

When Jesus gives his disciples (and us) the new commandment to love one another, this is not just for their own benefit. The kind of love they show each other is meant to be a witness to all the world of the kind of love that God has for humanity and that God makes possible for us. "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another," (v. 35). Explore how individual Christians and the church as a whole live up to this commandment today.

You may choose to end the sermon by offering some concrete examples about how serving others can become a spiritual discipline, both individually and communally.



## Discussion Questions

*If you choose to have a more conversational time of worship together, you may choose to skip giving a message and instead just read the Scripture together and discuss these questions. You can use the key points above to help move the conversation. Or you may use the discussion questions to go deeper after preaching a sermon.*

1. Simon Peter has a strong reaction to Jesus washing his feet and an equally strong reaction when Jesus tells him it is necessary. Why do you think he reacts like this?
2. How have you experienced love? Are there times you find it hard to accept love/service from others? Are there times you find it hard to be humble/serve others? How might Jesus' "new commandment" speak to you in those times?
3. Jesus tells the disciples everyone will know they are his followers if they love one another. Would people know you are a disciple of Jesus by the way you live? How can the church become more recognizable to the world as people who love one another?

## Prayer of Confession

Loving God,

We pray to you today, thankful for the warm invitation to sit at your table, thankful for the way you love us and teach us how to love each other. We admit that there are times when we fall short in loving the way you call us to. There are times when we maintain the status quo instead of humbling ourselves to care for one another. There are times when we push away each other's love because it means letting others in. Worse, there are times when we betray you and hurt each other, knowingly or unknowingly. We admit that the world does not always know us by our love. Forgive us, Jesus, by your broken body and blood shed for us. Let us not take your forgiveness lightly but accept it as both a gift and a call to be the people we were made to be. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

## Foot Washing at Home

*Consider providing these words for members of a household to say to one another as they wash each other's feet, or their own feet if they are worshipping alone. Or the pastor may speak the words in an online service as worshippers wash their feet at home.*

Humble service is the message behind foot washing. As C.S. Lewis once said, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less."

### Washing another's feet

Just as Jesus, the teacher, washed the disciples' feet, so does Jesus wash your feet. Accept this love and service from God and from me. Pass this love and service on to others in humility, not regarding yourself as better than others.

### Washing your own feet (if you're worshipping alone)

Just as Jesus, the teacher, washed the disciples' feet, so does Jesus wash my feet. As I accept love and service from God, I will also love and serve others in humility, not regarding myself as better than others.



## Communion Liturgy (Great Thanksgiving)

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them up to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

It is right and a happy thing  
for us to praise and thank the God who created us and created everything.  
You created us for relationship with you.  
When we betrayed you, you kept your promise to love us.  
You kept calling us forward, toward you – out of bondage and through the wilderness.  
You made banquet tables for us in the most unlikely of places,  
even in death's valley as enemies surrounded us.  
And so, with all your people from every age and place, we praise you saying (singing),

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

God, you are holy and so is your Son, Jesus Christ,  
but you showed us that real holiness is not about being above others.  
Jesus, you showed us that holiness looks like humility.  
You showed us holiness looks like breaking bread together,  
like washing your disciples' feet.  
You showed us that holiness looks like love that gives of itself.  
When the world was cruel and violent toward you,  
You did not return evil for evil. You died.  
The world-shattering event happened three days later when you rose from the dead.  
You made it clear that all sin and evil in the world cannot outdo your living love.  
Your disciples became the church, a people sustained by your presence,  
a people called to the work of humble service and love that you started.



You promised your presence to the disciples and to us  
at the meal you shared with them right before you were killed.  
You took some bread, thanked God, broke it,  
and gave it to your friends gathered there, saying:  
“Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.  
Do this in remembrance of me.”

Then later, you took a cup of wine and thanked God for it too.  
You gave the cup to your disciples and told them:  
“Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant,  
poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.  
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

So, as we remember that special meal and the promise of your presence, Jesus,  
we partake of the bread and cup in gratitude and with awe.  
In remembering you this way, we commit ourselves to living by your example, but not just that!  
We live by your example only through your power, giving ourselves back to you as you gave to us by the mystery of our  
faith.

**Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.**

Now, we call on your Holy Spirit to be with us,  
and to be in this ordinary bread and this ordinary cup,  
to transform them into the body and blood of Jesus,  
cleansing us from our sin and nourishing us to do your work in the world.

Spirit, bind us in relationship with Jesus and with one another,  
so we can give the world the kind of love Jesus gives us,  
until the fullness of time comes and we can all see God face to face.

Through Jesus, the Spirit, and your people, may it be known that everything good and right and true comes from you  
and belongs to you forever, amazing God.

**Amen.**



## **Sending**

Our parting words today are simple but important. Do as Jesus says: Love one another, just as Jesus has loved you. By this, the world will know you are disciples of Jesus.

## **Music Suggestions**

### **Traditional:**

What Wondrous Love is This (UMH #292)  
Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service (UMH #581)  
Blessed Be the Tie That Binds (UMH #557)

### **Contemporary:**

The Servant Song (TFWS #2222)  
They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love (TFWS #2223)  
Lamb of God (CCLI Song #229732)  
Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone) (CCLI Song #4768151)

## **Acts of Service**

If you're not hosting a worship service, consider inviting people to pray the unison prayer and/or the prayer of confession and to engage in an act of service in the spirit of Maundy Thursday. Ideas for acts of service:

- Actively participate in a mission your church is already engaged in (be specific about how to do this).
- Bring a meal or baked goods to a shut-in or someone in your congregation going through a difficult time.
- Volunteer at a soup kitchen or shelter if it is safe to do so.
- Donate food or money to a foodbank.
- Offer to pick up groceries, do errands for a neighbor or someone who cannot do it on their own.
- Look up "random acts of kindness" online – pick one and do it (for someone who wouldn't expect it)
- Children can make a craft or card to give someone to cheer them up.
- Go out of your way to serve someone else in your household. Be open to their serving you too.