

**“A God Who Loves” | Maundy Thursday | John 13:1–17, 31b–35**  
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As a child I used to sing that popular old Sunday School song, “He’s got the whole world in His hands.” I didn’t fully grasp what I was singing then and, truth be told, I’m still not sure I have wrapped my mind around what it means to say that every power is at God’s disposal. Every authority under heaven and earth is His. He has created everything from nothing, and He holds everything in His eternal hands.

What’s more, it seems even more incredible to say that Jesus holds the whole world in His hands. But indeed we confess that indeed He does. But what is even more incredible is what Jesus does with those hands. Our Gospel text He removes his outer garments, lays them aside, takes a bowl of water, and uses His divine hands to remove the sandals from the dirty, travel-worn feet of His disciples. He holds those feet in his hands, and washes them.

He’s got the whole world in His hands. And He knows that the Father has given all things into His hands. But He takes into His hands the dirty feet of the men who have walked with Him day after day. And cleans them.

God has hands. This is not metaphorical language. This is not an anthropomorphism, where we assign human characteristics to God. No, in the person of Jesus, God joined himself to human flesh. God has hands. And feet. And eyes, ears, fingers, and legs. And with these, He stoops down to take up the feet of sinful men into His hands.

You can understand Peter’s protest, then can’t you? His God should not wash his feet. This is unbecoming of a proper God. Gods should be far removed from their creations, distant from the creatures they created, especially if their creatures have rebelled and set themselves against the goodness and graciousness of the god. “You shall never wash my feet!” So you would also protest, given the opportunity.

Then we hear Jesus’ words, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with Me,” frustrate Peter’s pious pretensions. He relents, but he must have still felt, deep down, that this was still all wrong. Washing feet is not what the Christ should do, not what a god should do. This is slave labor, a servant’s task.

But then, as if that weren’t enough, Jesus asks, “Do you understand what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.” And, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Good grief. Not only does Jesus turn all of our thoughts and ideas about God on their heads, now Jesus tells his disciples and us to, “Do as I have done to you.” “As I have

done” means taking the lowest, most servile position of the foot-washing servant. Jesus calls us to love one another like that?

This is painful. This is difficult. You’ll abide with the command to love others to a point. “Love one another as you see fit” is the creed of American popular religion. But, “Love as I have loved you”? With a foot-washing, self-deprecating kind of love? A self-sacrificing kind of love? No thanks. For it’s far easier to love others as we wish to be loved. But to love as Jesus loves you? To love selflessly and sacrificially? That’s a tall order.

But Jesus gives this new commandment, this *mandatum novum*—the reason we call today “Maundy Thursday”—on the night when He is betrayed, given into the hands of sinful men. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you.”

Simple.

Do this, Jesus bids. Love like this. Like I do. Love those who can never deserve it, those who hate you, who reject you, who are inclined toward your destruction. Wash their feet. Assume the posture of a servant. Or worse, absolve their sins. Give them forgiveness for sins; forgiveness they could never deserve. Love like that. Love incarnationally. Love as flesh among flesh. Love as sinners among sinners. Love those who cannot and will not ever deserve your love. Love to forgive those who are completely unforgiveable. Love with your hands. Love in order to remove the filth, the guilt, the shame of your brothers and sisters. Love in order to get the dirt of your fellow man onto your own hands so that he might be clean. Love because your love will never be repaid. Love sacrificially. Love and never expect anything in return. Love as I have loved you, Jesus commands.

“By this all people will know that you are My disciples,” if you have love for one another like this.

But, I mean, come on. Who does that? Who is capable of that? Truth be told, no one. But Jesus loves perfectly and doesn’t wait for you to love others in order to show His love for you. He loves. He washes feet but if foot washing were the extent of Jesus’ love, that would be manageable. But He doesn’t have hands just to take up His disciples’ grimy feet. He doesn’t have fingers merely as instruments to scrub between their toes. He has the whole world in His hands. And He intends those hands to be nailed to the cross. This is His love.

Behold the man who loves those who are completely unlovable. Behold the man who loves those who, in just a few minutes, will abandon Him, will flee to save their own lives. Behold the man who loves those who could never deserve it. Behold the man who is God and who, in order to love His creatures perfectly and completely, has become man. Behold the man who loves the world completely and perfectly in His death on the cross.

If you want to love like this, like Jesus did, like He commands His disciples to love, you will never get there relying on your own deficient, selfish love. If you want to love like this, you've got to be loved like this.

And this evening we see that "As I have loved you" is here, on the altar. The fruits of Jesus' sacrificial love are in the meal he instituted for us on this night, the night he was betrayed. Given for you to eat and to drink.

Behold the man who gave Himself in the perfect act of love. Behold the man who on this night 2000 years ago, took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to His disciples as His own body. Behold the man who poured His blood into the loveless mouths of His disciples to forgive their sins. Behold the man, who comes to us tonight, in perfect love, with the bread and wine, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins, for life and salvation.

This feast of love fulfills Jesus' command to love one another. Here, as you are fed and nourished with the body and blood of the only One ever to love like this, you are strengthened, as we say often, "in fervent love toward one another." Disciples who feed together on the same loving Lord are united together in love. "By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

In order to love like Jesus, behold the man. On His altar, behold the man. In the bread and the wine, behold the man. Behold the man who loves you enough to forgive you freely not just on this night, not just on this week, but day after day, week after week.

Behold the man. The God Who Loves You Perfectly. Amen.