

Maundy Thursday

April 9, 2009

Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14

Psalms 116:1, 10-17

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The party's over. Nobody has actually said so, but it obviously is over; they could feel it and see it in Jesus' face. It had been fun while it lasted, traveling around and seeing all sorts of new places, even Jerusalem – heady stuff for boys from rural, remote Galilee, so much better than sitting all day in a fishing boat or counting coins or farming or whatever.

They had met all sorts of new people, huge crowds, and seen some truly amazing and mysterious things, miracles you would call them; it had been exciting, thrilling, fun. It was like being in on the ground floor of some great new project that would change Israel, perhaps change the world.

Now it's not fun. Jesus is distant, His eyes on something they cannot see. Jesus is withdrawn, preoccupied, hearing things they cannot hear. It's a serious, sad little dinner party indeed.

He's made His farewell address. He obviously expects to be leaving, going away. It's a short address, an admonition, a "new commandment" He calls it; "Love one another as I have loved you." As I have loved you: they have to ponder that.

Does it have anything to do with the washing of feet? Was it not strange that the leader and teacher of them all should become their servant, demeaning himself and performing the lowliest of tasks, the humblest of acts, for them? Why did He do that?

Slowly it sinks in: Jesus loves them, sacrificially, totally, without qualifications. It is a love in which the greatest become servants of the most humble, in which the first becomes the last and the last first, in which the world itself can be transformed. If that is what the love of Jesus has been, and Jesus calls them to love one another just so, then the commandment is a commission, a call.

The commandment, the commission, the call is as fresh and clear this evening as it was to the eleven in that upper room; now the call and commandment are ours. The “new commandment” to the disciples defined what it means to be Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ. His call to serve was not limited to the eleven in that room; it was a call to serve, in love, all those that are in need and even those who were not, all the children of God’s creation. It’s a huge task, one that was served in the streets of Jerusalem, the dusty roads of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth by those who shared Our Lord’s Last Supper.

In nearly two thousand years that “new” commandment has not grown old. Today and every day it’s our commandment, our call.

In His Holy Name.