

**"A new command I give you: Love one another.
As I have loved you, so you must love one another"**

A new commandment - how out of touch can you be on an Easter long-weekend! While people are busy packing their hot cross buns and Easter eggs and heading off with their families for a bit of r & r, fresh air and sunshine, to camping grounds, the beach, river and Oakbank in droves, or planning to drink themselves to oblivion, the Christian celebration of Easter starts with - a commandment!

We don't use the word commandment too much these days, commandments seem to belong to Moses and the Old Testament, not modern Australia, and sometimes we followers of Jesus don't even like to use the word too much anymore either. Commandments sound authoritarian and we don't like being told what to do by anyone, not even by God. "Suggestions, helpful hints, ideas to consider, possibilities, options..", yes, options we want options so we can opt out, not commandments! Haven't we got enough of them? Don't we have enough trouble keeping the one's we've got! Is it really a new commandment anyway? Aren't all the commandments about love? Didn't Jesus summarise all ten by saying "love the Lord your God with all your heart soul mind and strength and love your neighbour as yourself?"

On Maundy Thursday, which means "command Thursday" Jesus commands us to love. I know I am supposed to love, the problem is doing it, and consistently. I know I should love and sometimes even want to love, but sometimes it's all too hard, too inconvenient, sometimes I think why should I? Sometimes I think I deserve more love so why should I give it out? I reserve the right not to love! Some people don't deserve my love. Why should I love them? Love has its limits! I came to mine this morning. On my morning walk I came across a lady struggling to clean up after her dog. She had the obligatory plastic bag in one hand, the dog straining at the lead on the other and bags under her arms. I walked past glad I didn't have a dog! What if I had stopped and offered to help her clean up after her dog? What a statement of Christian love on Maundy Thursday "command to love" Thursday! But it was too much. Too hard, too yucky. My love has its limits....

So does Easter begin by telling me to love, something I already know, but find so hard to do?

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" The command isn't new. What is new are the words **"as I have loved you"**. And that is why we are here this weekend and will come back again and again over this weekend, watch Jesus love, and to be loved by Jesus, receive his love, and to be empowered to love by him.

The night before Jesus died Jesus washed his disciples feet and instituted Holy Communion. Jesus rose from the table tied a towel around his waist and poured a basin full of water. He knelt down and began to wash his disciples' feet and dry them with the towel he was wearing. An act of loving service.

Peter objected. **"You shall never wash my feet."** Peter is too proud to have Jesus bend down to wash his feet – just like many people today too proud to admit they need Jesus to wash and forgive them. **"If I do not wash you, you have no part with me,"** Jesus says to Peter. To belong to Jesus, to have a part with him, fellowship with him, connection with him means we need to be washed by him, washed of our lack of love and loveless words and behaviour that need to be cleaned up by him. Our stubborn selfish streak needs to be washed away on the inside as well as our external actions.

"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Peter recognized he needed Jesus to wash him completely, not just a foot washing, but inside and out. To be a disciple of the Lord Jesus is to have your feet lovingly washed by Jesus, and not only

your feet but your head and hands and heart and mind as well, so that you in turn may wash the feet of others, to lovingly serve them for Jesus. **“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you”**

I was listening to talkback radio as I drove the other afternoon and they were talking about the meaning of Easter. The host said she really admired the loving serving humble Jesus, if only we were all more like him the world would be a better place. And that’s basically where it was left. Jesus as example, impossible example. If that’s all Jesus did, give me an impossible example, I might as well have gone fishing too this weekend. But Jesus offers us more than an example, he doesn’t ask what he hasn’t given. He not only shows us how to love by washing feet, loving in a way beyond what we would normally do, but he is about to die in love for all of us. He dies to wash us all inside and out. He gives us the very love he wants us to give eachother. **“as I have done for you...”**

Do you realize that we experience here this weekend a love that enables us and empowers us to love, to love like Jesus, humbly sacrificially, extravagantly, generously. A power to love with new possibilities, in ways we might not normally consider. To forgive where we might not, to consider someone else where we might have thought of ourselves. To give of ourselves when we would rather receive. To respond to God and love him in new ways especially by loving those others would despise and in ways others wouldn’t bother. To wash feet.

We are here and Christians gather all over the world over the next three days to celebrate and experience again the love of the God who has loved us to death, to not only show us what love is but empower us for it.ourselves. Jesus doesn’t just give his disciples and us yet another impossible commandment on Maundy Thursday, he gives us a love that creates the potential and possibility and power for that same kind of love in us. Jesus gives us the love he asks of us. He gives us himself and his love, in order that we might give it away to eachother.

The early Christians were known for their love of eachother. It showed in generosity, selling land and houses to look after eachother, spending time with eachother and God , opening their homes to eachother. Organizing themselves to love the most vulnerable in their communities. It wasn’t something they did because they had to, were commanded to and had no choice about, it wasn’t because they were on roster that weekend, they wanted to love and they wanted to love because of the love they had received from Christ, the love of Easter.

The first Christians met in homes daily to receive Christ in the bread and wine, no wonder they were empowered to love. In a moment we will receive that love with our own lips and drink it, we will take it in our hands and eat it, the love broken and given on Good Friday, the love wrapped up in bread and wine for us in Holy Communion. The body and blood of our Lord, given and shed in love for you.

Having been loved by Jesus tonight, washed, forgiven and fed with his love, will we have to be told to love, commanded to love or will we want to love people we wouldn’t normally and in ways we wouldn’t normally consider. We can’t help ourselves, we have been moved by his love. What will love mean when your neighbour becomes unemployed in the next 6 months, what will love mean when the elderly in the pews around you can no longer come to worship, what will love mean when strangers and visitors come here looking for food or clothes, what will love mean when any of us goes AWOL from the congregation? What will it mean when we disagree on our building plans or how to pay for them? What will love mean when one of us becomes ill....or dies?

To love is his command to you at the beginning of Easter. Tonight, tomorrow and on Sunday he again gives you the power to do it. May you experience the blessing of this command that gives what it asks of you and may you be a blessing as you keep it. Amen.