

**JESUS' NEW WAY OF LIVING**  
**Maundy Thursday, April 1, 2010**  
**Grace Episcopal Church – Haddonfield, Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close**

Tonight is April 1<sup>st</sup>, and in the world, today is April Fool's Day. It's a day for practical jokes, tricks and pranks. It's all meant in jest ... it's just for fun. Sometimes, I think this is the way the world looks at Jesus and Christianity ... it's just a joke. Surely we jest about our faith. Jesus couldn't have meant all those things he said ... could he?

Tonight, Maundy Thursday, we celebrate the three mysteries that Jesus started. In each case, Jesus said to his disciples, and he says to us ... "Do this." First, there is the call to servant hood. Christians first and foremost are servants. Second, we are called to share in the sacrament of Holy Communion. Jesus gives us the gift of the bread and wine with new meaning. Third, Jesus calls us to love one another as we have been loved. These three things are core values and of central importance to us.

Tonight's three mysteries find their roots in Judaism. Christians read the prophet Isaiah and see the description of a suffering servant who comes as God's savior. We understand this to be Jesus. Earlier this night we celebrated a reenactment of the Jewish Seder meal. The meal that Jesus and his disciples celebrated was a Passover meal. Jesus' call to love echoes the teaching in Deuteronomy and Exodus ... the call to love God and the call to love others.

The stories in John's Gospel remind us of the practices of Jesus' day that support what is happening tonight. The foot washing recalls the practice of hospitality. The meal with the bread and wine are so familiar to Jesus and his disciples. Finally, the sacrifice that Jesus makes is out of love for us! The three mysteries tonight involve all this and more!

Herbert O'Driscoll writes in his book, "Four Days in Spring" that these passages of the Bible reshape and transform us in no other way imagined! What is happening is that the disciples are arguing and fighting about who will be the greatest! It's their quest for attention, for self-focus. We see it in our schoolyards and boardrooms. To be the greatest means to get the most ... Jesus doesn't come into the fight to break it up, **JESUS RESPONDS WITH ACTION!**

Check out the scene. It's before dinner. Jesus removes garments, fetches towels and waters ... he acts like a slave ... and begins to wash their feet! Before the Last Supper, before the celebration of the first Holy Communion ... Jesus shows us how to live ... we are called to act like servants. Jesus says to the disciples, "I come as a servant!" The echoes of Isaiah's servant ring true here!

To be a Christian is to put aside our relentless pursuit of self-fulfillment. We have to stop the drive for strokes, or being appreciated, or being at the head of the line. It's not about power or authority. It's not about where we stand in the line of life. **IT'S ABOUT CARING FOR OTHERS!** We must become servants. If we don't understand this ... then we don't understand Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God. Jesus humbles himself and performs the menial act of hospitality ... foot washing. It is here that he points us towards a core value of Christianity ... to serve others.

**JESUS' NEW WAY OF LIVING**  
**Maundy Thursday, April 1, 2010**  
**Grace Episcopal Church – Haddonfield, Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close**

But difficulty for us is putting it in practice. We have to move beyond our culture of “Serve me” and the desire for power. Our call is to become like Jesus who serves, who gives up power, who becomes humble. We can call this radical servant hood. It’s the mark of a Christian.

Next comes the great mystery of Holy Communion. At an ordinary meal, a memory of the Passover, Jesus turns it into something different ... a sacrament. He takes the bread and wine and transforms it. Jesus takes the bread and wine, gives thanks, breaks the bread and blesses the cup, then gives it to his disciples to share. The bread will come to be a sign of Jesus’ body ... broken and given up for us. The wine will come to be a sign of Jesus’ blood ... shed for our sins and us.

We are told to “Do this” and to “remember.” Jesus is pointing to the sacrifice that he will make for us. We recall the Paschal lambs sacrificed for the first Passover, the blood painted on the doors to protect the Israelites from the Angel of Death. Now the sacrifice will be Jesus’ body and blood ... now the Angel of Death will not be the last word for Christians.

The Holy Communion becomes our central sacrament ... the act we repeat every service to remember and to participate in what Jesus has done for us. There is a new way of being for Christians. The common share meal becomes a reminder of what Jesus has done and a promise of what waits for us ... a new life.

The final great mystery of this night is Jesus’ new commandment. The word “Maundy” means commandment ... and this night Jesus gives us the new way of living ... the “love” commandment. Jesus’ actions this night lead us to this core value, to love one another as we have been loved. The foot washing was an act of love. It is the sign of how we are to live out our lives too.

The “towel” ministry of Jesus speaks to caring, hospitality, compassion and sharing. It is grounded in a focus on others. It is made up of the unselfish act of humility and servant hood. Peter has a hard time hearing this new commandment tonight ...do we? At the foot washing, Peter objects ... either out of embarrassment or some sense of pride. Jesus says ... if you are to be a part of me, then this is the way. Are we part of Jesus?

So here we are tonight. Caught up in the drama of the last four spring days of Jesus’ life. It starts tonight ... with a foot washing ... with a meal ... with a call to love one another. Jesus’ actions become the new way we are to live our lives ... his way of love is to become for us our way of living. Tonight, we have a chance to participate in the great moments of the great mysteries ... and be changed!

**JESUS' NEW WAY OF LIVING**  
**Maundy Thursday, April 1, 2010**  
**Grace Episcopal Church – Haddonfield, Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close**