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St. James', Mt. Airy
4/18/19

Maundy Thursday
Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14
Psalm 116:1, 10-17
1 Corinthians 11:23-26
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

Tonight we begin the three great days of the church year – Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday – that lead us to Easter morning. Every year we tell the same stories, which are, in essence, one love story, told in three parts.

Tonight we begin – A Love Story, Part 1.

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Maundy Thursday gets its name from the Latin word *mandatum*, meaning commandment. It refers to the commandment Jesus gives his friends after sharing a final meal with them and washing their feet.

That commandment was to love one another as Christ loved us – and to do it so fully by it we would be known as his own.

Jesus showed over and over again throughout his life what it means to love one another – from the way he called together a community, to how he healed those in need, to his teachings on forgiveness and reconciliation, and so much more.

And on this last night with his friends, he showed them what it means to love again – this time through the bread and wine, and his promise that when they (and we) gather in his name to break bread and share the cup he will be there too – and through the humble act of washing another's feet, to demonstrate servant leadership and the power of vulnerability.

When Peter questioned Jesus' actions – not understanding, or perhaps not willing to believe what Jesus meant – Jesus acknowledged they did not know what he was doing, but that later they would understand.

I wonder if that gave them comfort, his assurance that they would understand at some point. Did they remember it later that night as events unfolded in the garden and Jesus was arrested? Did they hold on to that promise of understanding over the course of the next day, as Jesus was put on trial and then led away like a criminal? Did it give them a touchstone of hope when they saw him on the cross, to hope beyond hope that the unimaginable despair would at some point make sense?

Well, those...those are questions for tomorrow's part of the love story. Tonight we remain in the upper room – where the love is about gathering for a meal and taking care of one another. Where it's about putting the needs of others – the common good – at the center of life, with the admonition that when we do that, we will be known as disciples (those who are called and sent forth in God's name).

And we remember this promise, which began our Gospel reading:

Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

The end is an unfolding thing. Tonight, **the end** of our Gospel reading is the commandment to love. **The end** of our liturgy tonight will be processing the bread and wine that we will share on Good Friday to the altar of repose – then stripping the altar bare – and finally extinguishing the sanctuary light, a light that burns every day and every night all year except between tonight and Easter – leaving in silence and shadow in anticipation of what comes next.

None of those endings is the end of God's love. But that's another story for another time – and to hear the next part you'll have to come back tomorrow night. Rest well and I'll see you then for A Love Story, Part 2.