

Maundy Thursday

April 2, 2026

The Rev. Amanda Gerken-Nelson

We have entered the Triduum – the three holy days leading up to Easter Sunday

Whether we're thinking about entering into these days ourselves or if we think about the disciples entering into these last days with Jesus, in either case, we should not be surprised we're here

For the disciples, Jesus has been talking about these coming events for some time

And for us, we've come to this place before – we know what comes tomorrow and the rest of the weekend

But before we get too far ahead of ourselves, tonight we are here, tonight we are gathered with Jesus and his disciples after a long journey – we gather for fellowship, and we gather for a meal

Tomorrow's events are of course on the horizon: Jesus knows what's coming, we know what's coming

But, for the moment, we are here

And what is it Jesus chooses to do in this moment we're together?

According to John, on this last night with his disciples Jesus does something they don't expect: as they gather in the apartment where they're going to be, Jesus takes the role of a servant and washes his disciples' feet

According to the other gospel writers, on this last night with his disciples, Jesus does something they don't expect: as they share a meal Jesus picks

up bread and says “this is my body” and picks up the chalice of wine and says “this is my blood”

Maundy Thursday for us is a mix-mash of these two narratives so, blessedly, we get both!

But in either case, what we witness from Jesus is something very intentional

In both acts of washing his disciples’ feet and sharing a meal, Jesus is deliberately showing his disciples how to build and be a community together ahead of the trauma they are about to experience

As our communion liturgy so pointedly reminds us, it is on the night before he was *betrayed* that Jesus gathered his friends and gave them the tools they needed to strengthen the bonds between them so that they might be prepared to endure the difficult times that lie ahead

Rev. Cody Sanders notes that “the thing that helps us not develop long term trauma symptoms is the community we have to hold us in the aftermath”¹

“the thing,” *the* determining factor, “that helps us not develop long term trauma symptoms is the community we have to hold us in the aftermath” of what we experience

Of course the trauma affects us – but what determines our ability to cope or to develop coping skills, is the throughline of a community who held you before and will hold you after whatever we might endure

And, Jesus, knowing this to be true, gives an exclamation point to the ministry he has daily lived on this last night with his friends

¹ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/podcasts/1076-maundy-thursday-april-2-2026>

How do we build the bonds that help us hold onto each other whatever trauma or hardship may befall us?

Feed each other – Serve each other in love

Rev. Sander's colleague, Matt Skinner, notes that Jesus' commandment to love one another that accompanies his gracious act of washing the feet of his disciples is not a novel commandment for Jesus and his Jewish companions, but Jesus *is* asking his friends that it be differently embodied now²

Jesus isn't the first to wash someone's feet – as I said before, Jesus surprised his friends by this act because it was usually the role of a servant to do such a thing

And just as surprisingly, it wasn't that long ago that Jesus had his feet washed, not by a servant, but by his dear friend Mary who, out of an abundance of love, lavishly tended to his feet

The feet-washing isn't new, but the posture Jesus is asking us to take towards each other is different

How do we build a community that can hold each other through whatever might come our way? Serve each other in love as you have been shown love!

Just as the command to love one another is not novel to Jesus' friends, neither is sharing a meal

Have you ever noticed how often Jesus and his disciples are eating?

Jesus was constantly getting in trouble for eating with the wrong people – tax collectors and sinners!

² *ibid.*

Jesus' meal-ministry was one of the most scandalous parts to his contemporaries and, to him, it was one of the most important

Time and again Jesus shows us that breaking bread together breaks barriers – assumptions of otherness or a perceived lack of connection diminishes when we share a table and a meal, assumptions of unworthiness and feelings of abandonment are shattered when someone offers “come and sit by me”

Sharing a meal is not a novel part of Jesus' ministry, but again the posture we take towards what we're doing – the intentionality of sharing grace (and I don't just mean the prayer before you eat) – matters

To really emphasize this, Jesus instructs his friends to practice a meal in which we intentionally and deliberately make ourselves aware of Jesus' eternal presence in our lives through the breaking of bread – his body – and drinking wine – his blood

“See this meal as a means of uniting with me! I am here at the table!” Jesus seems to say

It's truly no different when we gather around that table there, or around the tables that fill our sanctuary at our harvest dinner or at the tables of your Common Table group – Jesus is present!

But the practice of intentionally taking on the posture of communing with God in this meal, reveals the grace of God's presence at every other table around which we gather

How do we build a community that can hold each other through whatever might come our way? Feed each other and feed yourself at Jesus' table of grace!

Good Friday and Holy Saturday are coming, my friends

Literally the sun is setting and the days will come

But also, Good Fridays and Holy Saturdays are coming all throughout our life – whether it be terrifically terrible days or specific events, or periods of time and long durations – war, strife, conflict, unemployment or under-employment, health diagnoses, anxiety, fear, depression

Traumas with capital “T’s” or complex traumas that persists – Good Fridays and Holy Saturdays are, tragically, part of life

How we get through them depends *not* on our own fortitude, but on the community that holds us – individually and communally

Jesus taught us – commanded us! – how to be that community: Feed each other – Serve each other in love.

It is only through the blessing of community that we can make it to Sunday.
Amen.