

Maundy Thursday 13th April 2017

Reverend Roger Walker

St John 13: 1-17, 31: 6-35

We have come here tonight to remember Jesus, gathered with his disciples for their Last Supper and to obey Jesus' command that we too should take bread and wine and do this in remembrance of him. But strangely enough the focus of Maundy Thursday is not principally on this but on the commandment which Jesus gives to his disciples. He said ' a new commandment I give you - love one another. As I have loved you, so must you love one another'. He continued 'all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another'.

As we come to the end of Lent and stand in the threshold of Good Friday and stand on the threshold of Good Friday, we know the cost of Jesus' love for us. He died on the Cross to save us from our sins. None of the disciples sitting there with him could have had any conception of what was about to happen - betrayal, arrest, trials before Jewish and Roman authorities, mocking, scourging and crucifixion. Their next hours were going to be filled with bewilderment and fear. It would have been all too easy for them to scatter and avoid each other under these circumstances, but Jesus wanted them together. He wanted them to love one another, and they were together - through the resurrection appearances, through the ascension, through to the coming of the Holy Spirit and the persecution that followed.

Being together and loving each other was the foundation upon which Christ's Church was built. It is still the same today - the world will know that we are Jesus' disciples, his Church - if they see us together and see that we love one another. As we gather together this evening around the Lord's table we know that in fact this is what all our keeping of Lent has been about. We have looked at our lives as God sees them: we have come to him in penitence: we have prayed and we have read his word in the Bible. But all of this falls short of God's will - IF we do not love one another. Each time of his love for us and of his commandment 'love one another as I have loved you' he knew it would be hard for us to kneel beside a Christian brother or sister to receive his body and his blood and have negative feelings about them. The sacrament promotes love, and our love for each other is our greatest evangelical tool. No-one is going to want to join a Church if they see its members constantly quarrelling with each other. But they will feel very differently if, in Jesus' words 'they know that we are his disciples because they see our love for each other.'

This is our calling as we approach Easter. We want our church to grow numerically as well as spiritually, and tonight as we come together round his table, we are told quite explicitly what will make this happen 'love one another as I have loved you, and in this way all men will know that you are my disciples, and will want to be disciples themselves'.

Jesus understood our human nature. He knew how hard it would be for us to be constant in our Christian love for our brothers and sisters, 'seeking their highest good'. So he gave us this sacrament to draw us together, a symbol of his abiding presence with his Church. As we are drawn together and do this in remembrance of him, we are reminded again to love one another.

AMEN
13.4.17