



*"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* (John 13:34,35)

Dear People of God: I speak to you on this Maundy Thursday, gazing at a stripped altar and a stripped sanctuary. I speak to you choking back the tears of loss and anxious anticipation yet smiling through them as I realize a new way of reaching out to you.

I have been troubled by so many things in these last weeks but none quite as much as the statement: when can we get back to normal?

Normal? If normal means a world where we truly love one another I am all in, but I fear that is not what is meant! I for one am hoping that this pandemic ends for sure; I pray for healing and safety and I pray with love for the responders, not only the first ones but the consistent wave of courageous people showing up. I find myself each day, each night praying with gratitude that in the midst of our anxiety and isolations, we are witnessing a new way. We are embodying caring for one another.

There was nothing "normal" about Jesus! In fact, subversive might describe him as he lived to turn normal on its head!

On this Maundy Thursday might we once again testify to the divine value of NOT returning to normal (which implies a human misplaced value) and once again receive and respond to the new commandment which Jesus gives us. Love one another.

It seems to me that is exactly what Jesus was teaching us then and now.

He went on that evening to demonstrate the new normal as he washed his disciples feet. He made himself lower that he might fulfill the mission of service to others.

On this Maundy Thursday many of us might find our own ways of remembering the Upper Room, the foot washing, the Last Supper, the new commandment. We might in this time of COVID19 wash each others' hands making what has become an anxiety driven practice, a sacramental gesture. We might bless the food in this time when we grieve the loss of actual physical communion in favor of spiritual food blessed in the Name of the One who is to die and rise for us. And we might pray silently or aloud the ways we have witnessed exquisite care in these last weeks, care previously unthought of and undone. We will count ourselves in those numbers.

When we remember, we are re-membered, transformed, changed. We are becoming the fullest members of the Body of Christ responding to the grace received and the grace transmitted.

All of this mystical change brings us to the cross tomorrow. Because we have engaged authentically in Lent, more completely than ever before, we will be able to carry the sorrow on the rewoven cloaks of love. We are the people of the new commandment, new then, new today, new tomorrow. We are the bearers of God's love into the world especially as the One who taught us to testify to this Light goes to his death. We are still resurrection people who worship the God of resurrection in the midst of resurrection.

Draw close to the stripped altar of your lives, now missing familiar touchstones and icons. We will make new ones, we will patch old ones, we will rediscover lost ones. We will do this together, in communion and community.

We do this because we love one another! That is the new normal into which we are living!

Homily and Servant song at Stripped Altar

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqj4GDYrXt8>

Just As I Am

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBqU4IsCteU&feature=youtu.be>

Rev. Dr. Martha Tucker

*"And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and walk humbly with your God"*  
--Micah 6:8

*"We seldom notice how each day is a holy place Where the eucharist of the ordinary happens,  
Transforming our broken fragments Into an eternal continuity that keeps us."*

— *John O'Donohue, To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Invocations and Blessings*  
I would love to live like a river flows, carried by the surprise of its own unfolding.  
— **John O'Donohue**