

You might wonder where the word “Maundy” comes from. It is actually from the Latin for “mandate”. On this night the church remembers Christ’s mandate to us—to “love one another” as he has loved us. (John 13:34).

This meal is capable of so many meanings—thanksgiving, remembrance, feast, and anticipation. But its meaning must never be divorced from the meaning of “mandate”—the love of Christ for us all, which we are encouraged to have toward each other.

This is Paul’s chief concern, that somehow the meal of love has been replaced by one of social class and distinction. As Gordon Fee puts it, we eat this meal in remembrance of the Christ whose life was self-giving, not self-preserving.

There is also a social context which must be taken into account in regard to the situation in Corinth, as well as ours today. Gerd Theissen reminds us that Paul identifies two groups of Christians at Corinth, the *haves* and the *have-nots*, both in relation to food. Whereas the church as one body is to eat “the Lord’s Supper” (in the verse just previous to our reading), the *haves* are described as eating “their own supper”. The point does not seem to be that their bread and wine were of higher quality but that they ate a fuller meal in the context of the Lord’s Supper. The poor, however, scrounged around while the wealthy ate quite well.

Today, as in Paul’s day, those social distinctions still exist to some degree. We do well to remember how Jesus’ self-giving life included feeding the poor as well as dining with the rich, some of them religious (like the Pharisees), while others were social misfits, (like the tax collectors). How does the church eat

this meal of love when there are folks who might struggle to put food on their table? What does it mean that we all sit together in the presence of this Table during this worship?

The Foods Resource Bank offers us a helpful image for us to consider, inviting us to imagine all the people of earth in a single line from richest to poorest. We must see them all as individual beloved children of the Divine, not viewing some as sort of unworthy.

On one end is the poorest person in the world, and at the other end the richest. We are all in the line somewhere. Regardless of our place in the line, we have that tendency to look only in one direction—toward those wealthier than us. Perhaps the truest act of worship on this Maundy Thursday is to look in the other direction while eating this sacred meal, recognizing the poor among us and around the world.

May we embrace an image of a table big enough for all God's children, the *haves* and *have-nots*. Think about Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece *The Last Supper*, which so lovingly portrays Christ and his disciples gathered at table. As we can note, they are all on one side of the table, a rather awkward feature. But, we should also recognize how da Vinci's portrayal allows *all* who view this work to join them at the same table.

Thanks be to God!