

“A NIGHT OF LOVE AND BETRAYAL”

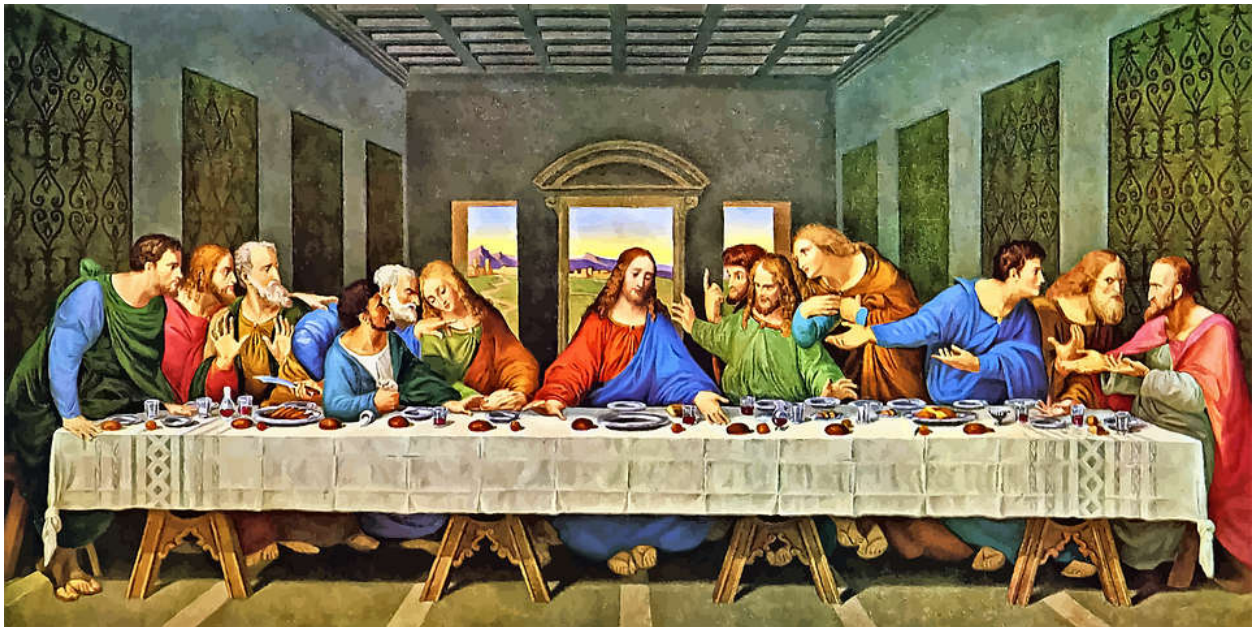
Message for *Maundy Thursday*

From Pastor Norman Staker

April 2, 2026

EXODUS 12: 1-4(5-10) 11-14 1 CORINTHIANS 11: 23-26

JOHN 13: 1-17, 31B-35



**GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR FATHER AND
FROM OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST. AMEN.**

HE IS RISEN: HE HAS RISEN INDEED!!

***D*o you like to say goodbye to anyone, for any reason? All of us have been in a situation where it is hard to say goodbye. We have all been in those situations where we have had to say goodbye to parents as we have moved away, goodbye to children as they have grown up, goodbye to a much**

loved pastor, or goodbye to a dying loved one. We have all been in those situations.

All of us handle these last goodbyes, these final farewells, in different ways. Some of us are rather unemotional. We shake hands and say goodbye. "Son, be good and take care of yourself." Some of us are more unemotional, controlling our feelings. Others of us are criers; we cry; we weep. We can't talk because we get all choked up. Still others of us are "happy go lucky" people, and we try to make our final farewell a good time and we laugh it off. And still others of us avoid these situations all together. That is, we never get caught in the situation of having to say the last goodbye. We avoid that situation at all costs. We can't say the last goodbyes and so we avoid the situation. Each of us handles these delicate situations differently.

Personally, being the emotional type, saying the last goodbyes has always been difficult for me. I am not very good at that. I feel that this is a character weakness that I have. I am not proud of it but I have learned to accept that this is the way I am.

I am simply saying to you that I am not very good at saying goodbye. I would rather avoid those situations, at almost all costs. Those events are not easy for me.

Such was the mood of the Last Supper of Jesus, the last night that Jesus shared a meal and conversation and friendship with his disciples. During that meal, they were so overwhelmed by the pain of the moment, they could not see the possibilities of the future. For three full years, these twelve men had learned to live and love each other. They had been together night and day for three full years: three years of meals, three years of miracles, three years of teaching. They had shared so much life and so much death together. Jesus had trained them for three years to be his disciples. And there they were in Jerusalem

together on the last night, the last meal, the last words, the last parting comments to each other, their last goodbyes. The disciples knew that Jesus was going to die and soon. This was their last moment together.

Such was the mood of the last supper. These men had grown to love each other and knew that this was the end of their relationship. This was an end of an era, an end of their earthly relationship of love as they had known it. This was the end of their three years together and they were very tight as a group with Jesus.

So... during that last supper, the disciples listened intently to the words of Jesus, hanging on to his every word. They knew that this was their final lesson, his final words, his last and final words. Words of wisdom, pearls of great price, gems for future generations. They listened carefully and wanted to understand and remember as much as they could.

They listened to every word of the wisest teacher they had ever heard, "I will not leave you an orphan. I will come to you again. I will send my spirit to come and live in you.

A woman who is about to deliver a child experiences great pain, but when the child is born, she forgets her pain. And so you will experience great pain at my leaving you, but when I come to you again, you will experience great joy as at the birth of a child." The disciples thought to themselves: What does that mean that he is going to come again, that we will forget the pain of his leaving us, that when he comes we will experience great joy like the birth of a child? What does this all mean?"

He continued with more words of wisdom, "In my house are many mansions. If this were not so, I would not have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you and when the time is right, I will come again and take you to myself." ... "Those words

make sense,” thought the first disciples,” but what do they mean. Many mansions? Go to prepare a place for you? Come again and get you to take you to these mansions? That’s good that Jesus has built living spaces for us, but where will these living mansions be and how will we get there?

The disciples again hung on to these priceless pearls. His words were so profound that they were beyond their grasp. Jesus said, “He who has seen me has seen the Father. He who knows me knows the Father. He who loves me, loves the Father.” The disciples thought to themselves, “OK fellows, this teaching is kind of heavy. Whoever sees, knows and loves Jesus, then sees, knows and loves the Father. Is Jesus saying he is like the Father? He can’t be saying he is the Father. He must be like the Father. Whoever sees, knows and loves me loves God. OK. I think that is what he is saying.”

Again Jesus spoke and the disciples were totally quiet as they concentrated intensely on these last words, on these last teachings, the last gems, the last pearls. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. If you love me, you will keep my words. A new commandment I give to you: love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. I command you: love one another.” The disciples thought to themselves. “A new commandment? To love one another as he has loved us? Those words seem to be clear. It is what he was saying all these past three years, to love one another. These words seem to be at the heart of his message. Are these his final words to us? His last words?”

Then it suddenly changed. No more words. All silence. A silence so deafening. The disciples thought to themselves, “What is he doing now? He is taking a towel. It is so quiet. No one is speaking. No one is stirring. No one is moving. Totally silent. Now he takes a bowl of water. We hear the splashing of the

water. The creak of the floor as he quietly moves. The rustle of his garments as he kneels before each disciple. Now he is washing the feet of one disciple. Now he is washing the feet of all the disciples, one at a time. No. Weird. Strange. A breathless silence. He, the master, washing each of our feet? What does this mean?" Jesus finally breaks the prolonged silence and he says, "Do to one another as I have done to you. Be loving servants of one another?"

All the while that Jesus talked, the disciples did not comprehend that Jesus was going to come again. I can understand that. We can understand that. We can understand not comprehending the meaning of the last words.

And so it is with all of us. Each of us takes our turns. We are too absorbed in the pain of the moment that we cannot see the possibilities of the future, the future that God has prepared for all of us.

And so it was with the disciples. They thought they were having their last goodbyes and they didn't comprehend his teachings. They couldn't comprehend his words because they were so absorbed in their pain of loss.

So often in life, we think it is all over, that we have said our last goodbyes. After almost 39 years of marriage, I kissed Joyce goodbye with full intentions of seeing her again later that evening. I told you I have a hard time saying goodbye but that night when we left, I didn't think would be our last one together, our last goodbye. But ... it wasn't goodbye. Yes, she was gone but we'd see each other again.

See, the last goodbye is not the final goodbye. The future continues. God's future continues. Jesus does not leave us orphans but God comes to us with his spirit who lives within us,

heals us, and prepares us for the future. God's future always overwhelms the sadness of today and yesterday.

The last supper was not the last supper but the beginning of the feast for all eternity.

When Jesus was crucified, we have called Good Friday. On Good Friday we remember that Jesus offered himself as the final, complete sacrifice for our sins, freeing us from a slavery we could never have freed ourselves from.

The day before Good Friday, today, is called Maundy Thursday. That Thursday, Jesus had a meal with his disciples in an upper room, somewhere in Jerusalem. Before the meal, he washed his disciples' feet. Jesus had a lot to say to his disciples over that meal. It occupies about five chapters in John's gospel. But in all that he said, there was just one thing which he actually commanded. He said, 'A NEW COMMANDMENT I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.'

Jesus' commandment to love one another is really important! We would assume that it's important. We would imagine that the day before he died, Jesus would remind his disciples of his most important instructions.

Jesus had already made it clear that the greatest commandment is to love: to love God, first, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. But Jesus isn't REMINDING his disciples of his most important instruction. He's giving them a new one! He says, 'A NEW COMMANDMENT I give to you'! Isn't it a bit late for Jesus to be giving them a new commandment?! And isn't this commandment just the same as the old commandment, to love our neighbors as ourselves? What's different?

Listen carefully! Jesus said: 'A new commandment I give to you, **THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER: JUST AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, YOU ALSO ARE TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.**' It's the same thing; or is it?

What's new? The quality of love which Jesus is asking us to show is new.

Jesus commanded his disciples, not simply to love one another, **BUT TO LOVE EACH OTHER AS HE HAD LOVED THEM.** It's hard to imagine anything more challenging!

Before Jesus gave this instruction, he washed his disciples' feet. Then he said, 'Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you ... Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.'

As far as we know this is the only occasion when Jesus washed his disciples' feet. If the ultimate expression of love was **LITERALLY** washing people's feet, Jesus would have been doing it the whole time. The primary meaning can't be **LITERALLY** washing feet. And it's clear that this was **NOT** what Jesus had in mind. Jesus tells Peter, 'Unless I wash you, you have no part with me'. That has nothing to do with Peter's feet being literally clean or dirty. The way that Jesus really showed his love for Peter was by going to the cross for him and taking his sin.

Holy Communion is also real. It is Jesus' action to serve and save us. We do not trust our subjective sensations of sight and touch to believe this. We have an even more-sure Word from the Son of God: "This is my body given for you. This is My blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." Yes, here, God gives us

a most precious and holy bloodbath. For where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

So draw near and take the body of the Lord, and drink the holy blood for you outpoured; offered was He for greatest and for least, Himself the victim and Himself the priest. Come forward then with faithful hearts sincere, and take the safeguard of salvation here: Christ's own body and blood, offered into death and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

Amen.