

## Newsletter Reflections for September

Perhaps it seems a strange time to be thinking and writing about Maundy Thursday but although the word maundy is familiar to us, it is only known to most of us in association with a particular season of the year (Lent)...and this isn't it. In fact, this word document is trying to insist that the word be capitalized because of that association. Yet the word is actually a Latin word which was adopted into our use because of the events which did occur on the night that Jesus was betrayed...that Thursday night when Jesus gathered with his disciples for a final meal...as they were recorded in John's gospel 13: 34-35—"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." The Latin looks like this: *mandatum novum* when taken from the Vulgate Bible: the translation of all the scriptures into Latin from their original language. From the Latin for *novum* meaning "new" and *mandatum* meaning "commandment" we have the day of commemoration of the Lord's Passion known as Maundy Thursday—that night he gave us a way to remember what he did for us—that night he gave us that understanding of what he did for us was done out of love—and told us that that was the way he wanted all those who followed him to be known—by the way that we followed THAT MANDATUM—that COMMANDMENT—that we love one another just as he has loved us. Mandatum—mandate...do you see the connection to the issues of our time? The word, not in Latin but in English is echoing around and around us, swirling madly in all sorts of hostile encounters. It is being used in the most divisive ways imaginable to create barriers between people to obscure the truth of what should be uniting us—a desire to care for one another. The mask mandate that is being asked for individuals to adhere to is not harmful to the one being asked to wear it; it does not damage the person wearing it. There are so many types and options, any discomfort can be made minimal. It may be inconvenient or slightly uncomfortable, but having had to wear one in laboratory situations which were much heavier and more cumbersome than those needed for these interactions, I can attest that there are available masks that provide protection and do not even cause discomfort for the majority of folks. The reason being given for this being so strongly resisted by so many is because it offends their individual rights. They don't like that they are being asked to do something which has two aspects of protection—and one of those aspect is that it protects them from this virus they cannot see but which is widespread in the community. Of course, if their decision only affected them then their individual choice could be valid. However, they do not live in isolation. They live in community so the wearing of a mask protects others (if they happen to have it, but are not showing symptoms, or if the symptoms they have are mild). These people who protest wearing masks evidently don't see any need to show care for others who live in their community; their behavior or value system does not provide for any need to care for others? They resent this idea of a "mandate" being given to them. In all honesty I wish that it was not necessary for this to be something that had become a matter to be debated in the public square—because to me the mandate—the *mandatum novum* given on that night over two thousand years ago covered this situation so clearly that we should not need any policy

statement about it from any governing body...the love and care we have for others should dictate our actions...we should do all that we can to ensure that this infection...in fact, that any infection, that is contagious is halted in its spread by whatever tools we have been given because we are called to care for one another as we are loved by the one who gave his life for us. This mandate was given long ago. That means that we use the tools that science give us...we get vaccinated. That means that we follow the guidance given to us...wearing our masks...and that we pray that our Lord will grant more people the wisdom to discern that the commandment that he gave means that we do not live our lives concerned with our “individual rights” but with the welfare of all in mind because our Lord came to redeem all because all are beloved children of God and we are called to love one another as we are loved. So when you hear that word mandate tossed about so freely, think about where it appears in our scriptures and how Jesus used it.

Shalom,

Pastor Libby