

Christ's Command & Us

Maundy Thursday, 6 April 2023
Rev. Dr. Dawn Jeffers Ramstad
Hudson United Methodist Church



We have a bit of Vietnamese influence in our family. When two of our children were and one was in preschool, I resumed one of my favorite luxuries from my single years, a regular manicure. For those of you who do not enjoy manicures, a regular manicure involves a 45-minute appointment at regular intervals to sit across a small table from another human being while they care for your hands. Over time that practice leads to conversation and friendship. The best manicurist in our suburban California neighborhood had immigrated from Viet Nam.

Linh's children were young adults. In time, Linh learned that when John and I lived in Paris I trained to be an English as a foreign language instructor. English as a foreign language instruction is about more than vocabulary, it is also about explaining your country's customs to you students, generally in international business. As we chatted one day Linh asked, "Why do Americans say 'please' when telling their children to do some work? They don't have a choice about doing the dishes."

Her observation of our common practice led to a very good question. She was right, when Americans expect their children to do something, we commonly say something like "Please do the dishes" rather than "Do the dishes."

My quick answer was "We want our children to use 'please' and 'thank you' as a curtesy. We are modeling how we want them to treat others."

Linh replied, "But don't they learn that when they hear you say please and thank you with your husband? Isn't it hard for them to learn responsibility if they don't see the difference between doing what you tell them to do and what you ask their father to do?"

Linh had a point. Our sons and I decided to try this Vietnamese way of parenting for a week. They liked it because when I said "please," they could say no and sometimes did. Now that they are all adults, our children know that my text message that says "Please call me" can wait until their convenience, while one that says "Call me" must be replied to as quickly as possible.

Jesus speaks to us like a Vietnamese mother raising responsible her children to be responsible adults. “I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other.” (John 13:34) No please. No thank you. Just his command, “Love each other. Just as I have loved you . . .”

Christ’s command is what Maundy Thursday is all about. The word “command” comes to our modern English from Old French. Our American military still uses command to mean a responsibility that a superior has assigned us that we are expected to carry out. The word “maundy” also comes to our English from Old French but is much closer to the original word that came into French from Latin, *mandatum*, an order that must be obeyed.

This evening we remember we must keep Christ’s command by imitating his actions. Then, foot washing was a common curtesy, usually performed for a guest by a slave at the command of the host. Now, we don’t do this in the Midwest, especially in the cold evenings of early spring. But we do something similar, we either wash our hands or use hand sanitizer before handing food to each other.

Medical researchers only discovered the importance of handwashing to control the spread of germs only 130 years ago. As their research progressed, we were encouraged to wash our hands to prevent spreading germs. Hand sanitizers were developed by the 1990’s for medical workers for use when running water wasn’t available. Just three years ago new signs appeared everywhere commanding us to wash our hands while humming *Happy Birthday* twice to slow the spread of the COVID virus. Hand sanitizer stations became common place, even on tables around our church building. Most of us use hand sanitizer as we care for each other; protecting each other from common germs spread by human touch.

It seems that using hand sanitizer is to us what foot washing was to Jesus and the disciples. So tonight, rather than washing each other’s hands I want you to pump hand sanitizer on each other’s hands. I am not asking. There is not please, just directions, a onetime command to remind us of Christ’s great command.

As you come forward to receive the Lord’s supper, you will walk past one of two hand care stations. There is a bowl of water to remind you of Jesus’ taking a bowl to wash the disciples’ feet. There is also a container of hand sanitizer. As you come to that station, the first person will turn to face the person behind them who will pump hand sanitizer into their hands. As the first person leaves to receive Christ’s meal, this turning to receive another’s care will continue. Jesus said, “Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other.” (John 13:34) *Amen.*