‘A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.’
John 13.34.

During a recent class at the AFC a JS asked me the question I always dread: ‘Why is it called *Good* Friday, sir, when it was such a terrible thing they did?’ I spluttered something about it being a *good* day because Christ took the rap for us, but I knew that his mind was elsewhere by this time. At 16 you just want a punchy little answer, don’t you?

So what would *you* have said? Why *is* it called Good Friday? Actually, that strange word ‘Good’ is peculiar to the English language. Germans use an obsolete word, *kar*, meaning ‘mourning’. (We get ‘care’ from it). They call it *Karfreitag,* ‘mourning Friday’. That makes more sense, doesn’t it? It’s better than ‘*Good* Friday’. Some people see ‘good’ as a synonym of ‘holy’. Some see it as *God’s* Friday, just as our modern ‘Goodbye’ is really ‘God-be-with-you’.

OK, so what about Maundy Thursday, then? (Some people pronounce it as Maun-*day*, as in Mon-*day*, but it is Maun*dy*). Thank goodness the JS didn’t ask where Maundy comes from! Well, it comes from the Latin of our text from *John* 13.34: *mandatum novum do vobis* – a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. A new *mandate*. English people are notoriously bad at foreign languages. Over the years *mandatum novum*, a new commandment, has become our ‘maundy’. So Maundy Thursday is really ‘Commandment Thursday’ (or better, *New* Commandment Thursday).

We gather tonight around the Lord’s Table to recall Christ’s Last Supper with his disciples before his execution.

But *Maundy* recalls something *else* that happened that fateful Thursday – Christ's washing his disciples' feet. Jesus was trying to teach them something here by his own example, *John* 13.12-15... A little later he spelt it out when he said, 'I am giving you a new commandment; that you love one another'.

Now *everyone* knows that Jesus said that we should love one another, don't they? But in fact, he *didn't* say that. What he *actually* said was not, 'Love one another', but 'Love one another *as* I *have loved you'.* And that's a very different matter. The new commandment is that we should love each other *as Jesus loves us.* And how *does* he love us? Well, for a start, he doesn't stand on his dignity and his rights. He rolled up his sleeves and reversed the master/servant role. They should have washed *his* feet. Instead, he, the Master, washed theirs. Is that *honestly* how Christians treat each other in church?

Did you see last Sunday's *Songs of Praise* from Knaresborough? They were celebrating a fact discovered only a few years ago by the late Arnold Kellett: 800 years ago King John gave the first Maundy money to 13 poor subjects in Knaresborough. Ever since then English monarchs have washed the feet of poor people, in imitation of our Lord, and given out money. It is a very inspiring thing that the high and mighty monarch should stoop to do a menial task for the poorest like washing their feet. After all, didn't the *King* of kings do it? Nowadays the feetwashing has been dropped, but the money is still given out.

It is *very* inspiring if it comes from the heart, and is not just a ceremony done for a day, but forgotten for the rest

of the year. And so I keep coming back to my question. Do we Christians *really* love each other *as Jesus loved us*? You see, you could argue, if you were cynical, that the feet-washing was a stunt to teach the disciples an important lesson. But Jesus actually lived this out every day of his life, and supremely at the end, when he went to the Cross, giving up his life that we condemned sinners might live eternally. The Cross has become *the* symbol of sacrifice, and everything about Jesus was Cross-shaped. Later in *John* at 15.12 Jesus repeats his command: 'This is my commandment, That ye love one another, *as I have loved you*. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.'

You see, I think we all agree with this, but, if we're honest, we don't *really* live like that in church. At our last Synod there was a vote on how money should be gathered from the various congregations. The little congregations stood to gain a great deal by this proposal at the expense of the bigger ones. Guess which way the smaller congregations voted? Yes, they all voted in their own self-interest. Love one another as *I* have loved you? I don't think so.

In joint pastorates I have watched how the minister is to be 'divided up'. It always comes down to this: 'we're the bigger congregation. We pay more, so we want more of his time'. Love one another, as *I* have loved you? I don't think so. I never hear, 'Yes, we're the bigger congregation, but the smaller one needs more help. Let *them* have the first call on the minister'. Where's the idea of *sacrifice*?

We Christians aren't really very different from people in the world, are we? Just like non-Christians we insist on our rights and won't yield. But *Jesus* yielded when he gave up his life on that Cross. The people in the world can't *really* see that we're following Jesus. Let's go back to *John* 13.34-35...

After 2000 years, yes 2000 years, we still haven't even started to obey Christ's new commandment. It's *new*, because no-one had ever loved other people the way Jesus did before; and it's *new*, because it still hasn't been tried.

And yet for all our failures truly to follow Jesus by obeying his new commandment to love each other as he loved us, he incredibly still loves us. We've flunked it as Christians these past 2000 years, but still he doesn't give up on us. People quite like Christ. It's Christians they can't stand! But Jesus never gives up on us, poor followers that we are.

And this is the heart of the gospel. This is why it's good news. Let's go *back* 2000 years ago. Jesus told them to love as *he* loved. Peter then said he would follow Jesus anywhere. Jesus said, 'Peter, you will deny me three times'. And of course he was right. Jesus then asked them to watch with him in Gethsemane, to give him moral support in his hour of need. Guess what? They fell asleep. Jesus said, 'The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak'. At the Last Supper they quarrelled over who was the greatest. What a shower! Hopeless Christians, just like us. And yet Jesus still loved them, as he still loves us. Isn't that the heart of the good news? Isn't that what grace is all about? But what an impact we would make if we really started to love as *he* loved us!