

Love One Another

Texts: Exodus 12:1-4 (5-10) 11-14
Ps. 116:1, 10-17

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (Series A. Maundy Thursday)
John 13:1-17, 31-35

Let us pray:

Judas had just left the room to meet the co-conspirators who were to arrest Jesus. It was then that Jesus began to talk about the glory that was the cross and about this new command he was giving them.

The **love** of which Jesus would speak was something that neither Judas, nor any of those who had rejected the Christ, could understand or accomplish. This love, this agape /divine love which loves unconditionally, comes only from a heart that is transformed by the power of Jesus' love.

The apostle John knew this because he wrote in his first letter, 1 John 4:19, "*We love because he first loved us.*" In 1 John 3:14, he also wrote, "*We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers/sisters.*" We are not only given the capacity to love like this because of Jesus' love but because that love works to change us into lovers. The unconditional love we give our brothers and sisters in the Christ is evidence that we have eternal life working in us!

A Fresh Command: Jesus said, "A new command I give you. Love one another." This is the one place in the gospel of John where Jesus uses this word for 'new.' There is another Greek word for 'new' that means 'recent' but this word here has the idea of 'fresh.' The command to love was an old one. The Law of Moses commanded that we were to love our neighbors as ourselves (Lev. 19:18). What made this command fresh was its appeal to love as Jesus loved them; love that is unconditional.

Never before had the Son of God given his life for sinners. What he had decided to do had never been done before. He would give himself up for them. And they were not particularly people of virtue.

In that very room, they had argued about which of them would be the greatest (Luke 22:24); arrogance and a lust for power drove that discussion. He knew that at the critical moment, they would run and hide when he would need their companionship most.

They would sleep instead of pray. They would boast of their own strength instead of seeking God's strength. They were not shining examples of faith or love but he gave himself up for them on the cross, *not just loving in spite of but loving because of...*

And Jesus calls upon all of us who are his followers to love people, despite their shortcomings. In fact, Jesus does even more than this and calls us to do the same; to draw people close and love them *because* they are weak and sinful. Jesus' death on the cross was *because* we were sinners, not only *in spite of* our sinfulness.

He knew that we needed what he would provide on the cross -- atonement from sin and a reason to go on. We are called upon to love with this divinely empowered affection -- loving because weak, sinful people *need loving*. This kind of love doesn't occur in the natural world. It is love that can only come from a heart where the Holy Spirit is in residence.

Our human nature instructs us to love those who love us, who are like us, who do the right thing, and who make the right decisions. Jesus' love, his nature which lives in the children of the Heavenly Father, instructs us to love those who hate us, love those who are unlike us, love those who do wrong things and make wrong decisions.

And this love is to exist among the followers of Jesus. Why? *Because we need loving, and we desperately need to experience God's love through one another.* Let's move closer to the passage, word for word, for a few moments.

A Command: Note that Jesus gave a fresh **command**, not a suggestion.

I'm glad that he didn't leave us room to wiggle out of this difficult responsibility. Loving one another isn't just a good idea. It's a *divine imperative* if we are to please the Father who bought and paid for us with the blood of his precious son. He gave a command because this is hard work sometimes.

It's impossible without a divine perspective, without spiritual power through the Holy Spirit. We can learn no other place of such love than Calvary where Jesus forgave his torturers, where divine love met all of our need for mercy and grace.

Jesus Commanded It: He is worthy to command such a thing because he perfected love in himself, willing to give himself to the agony and the loneliness of the cross. And for whom? For weak-willed, fearful souls who didn't know the way.

Love One Another: Our love is to be mutual. None of the disciples are exempt from loving. The heavenly family on earth is to be filled with unconditional regard for one another, self-sacrificing love. It isn't just to be the province of a few, but of all who would name Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

"By this Love will All people Know Love is the primary identifying mark of the people of God." Paul knew it when he wrote his chapter on love to the Corinthian Christians. *"Now abide faith, hope, and love, these three. But the greatest of these is love."* The greatest, most enduring legacy of the children of God is their love for God and one another.

Late 2nd century church historian, Tertullian, said that the pagans said of believers, *"Behold, how these Christians love one another!"* Minucius Felix reported the saying of an unbeliever called Caecilius; he said: *"They love one another almost before they know one another."*

The non-believer said this about Christians: *'They welcomed people they didn't even know.'* Leon Morris wrote, *"The heathen, of course, were prejudiced against the Christians. They did not like them at all and were ready to spread any slander about them. They ridiculed and opposed them. They put them in jail and executed them. But they were compelled to pay their grudging tribute to Christian love. It was undeniable."*

Those on the outside of our fellowship may forget most things about us: we meet at St. Ansgar's church; we meet weekly for Bible studies and prayer; we have Bazaars annually and Senior Fellowship lunches once per month; we have meaningful worship services. However, the thing that will engrave itself into the conscience and minds of those who watch us is *our love for one another, and how we treat one another.*

When I began my work in ministry in the mid 1980's in Herbert, Saskatchewan, I visited with a middle-aged woman who was once a member of St. Paul Lutheran, the Church where I pastored. She had moved to another community and lived, for several years, with a man to whom she wasn't married.

When I met Agatha, she was afflicted with a brain tumor. She had moved back to her home town of Herbert to be with family. The man she was living with didn't want her anymore. Agatha had been a Christian but had wandered away from her faith when she moved in with this man.

In our conversations, she felt somehow her illness was a punishment from God because of how she had lived her life. Whenever I visited her, I would gently nudge the conversation into the direction of God's love, and total forgiveness and say there is no sin or wrong-doing that is greater than God's grace.

I always felt there was something missing during our visits, so I had some of the members of the congregation pray and visit her at her home. Then the miracle I was looking for happened, when Agatha felt less judgment and more love; the acceptance of God's love and forgiveness became real to her. Eventually, her fellowship with God was restored.

I had never done anything like that before but the end result was great; a sister in Christ was rescued. A few months later she went to be with the Lord. It was the love of God's people that turned Agatha around; not judgment, but *fresh love* that Christ spoke about. What a wonderful event.

I have forgotten many things about my ministry in Herbert, but I have not forgotten my visits with *Agatha*. None of the apostles, who were there the night Jesus spoke about love, ever forgot it.

Peter wrote this, "*Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers and sisters, love one another deeply from the heart. For you have been born again...*"

(1 Pet. 1:22-23a)

One more reminder from John,

***“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.
Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.” (1 Jn. 4:7)***
Amen.

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