

## The Greatest of *these* is Love

### Love One Another

Texts: Acts 11:1-18

Revelation 21:1-6 (Series C, 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Easter) Ps. 148

John 13:31-35

*And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples.*

Let us pray:

A new Commandment from Jesus: *love one another as I have loved you*. Sure, sure, we've heard it all before, many times. Peter had to explain himself to those who criticized him for going to Gentiles and eating with them. He told them straight out that the Spirit directed him *not to make a distinction between them and us*.

Yet don't we all in our own time and place make distinctions about who is worthy of our time and attention, let alone *love*? But Jesus tells us clearly that we are to love everyone, not just those we already love. He also doesn't say only love the ones who will love you in return.

Our gospel text today is aimed at the whole Christian family, at the whole Church. Jesus says, "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples."

There are three main points to which I would like to draw your attention this morning: **Firstly**: Notice that love is not an option for the followers of Jesus. Jesus says, "*I give you a new commandment ...*". Not a *suggestion*, not a *recommendation*. *A commandment!*

This is not just a command to love like our mother or father but to love in the same way that Jesus loves us. Jesus said, "*As I have loved you, so you must love one another*." Notice the little word "*must*". Why does Jesus command us to love? He gives this command because there is a part of every one of us that rebels against the idea of pure, unconditional love.

Despite the example that we have in Jesus' *undeserved* and *unconditional* love for us - there is a part of us that says such love is out of place in the world in which we live. There is a part of us that says –"sure, loving others is great – but up to a point...."

Isn't that what we do all the time. We draw a line as to how much we are prepared to love the next person. We draw a line as to how far we are prepared to do a kind deed for someone else. We draw a line as to what people we are prepared to love.

We are happy to love in selective kind of way. We are comfortable with the kind of love that doesn't make us feel uncomfortable. We might be happy with this kind of love but it is not what Jesus was talking about here when he said, "*As I have loved you, so you must love one another*".

What Jesus says is quite plain. We should love others in the same way that Jesus loves us. His love is *sacrificial* and *self-giving*. We see that on the cross. He loved us so much that he willingly gave his life for us.

**Secondly:** Jesus loved *unconditionally*. He didn't draw a line and say that beyond that line it was too much to ask. His love knew no limits. That's how he commanded us to love – willingly and sacrificially. In fact, that's why Jesus commands us to love, because he knew that we are happy with a love that is anything but unconditional and sacrificial.

his is a far cry from the kind of love that we actually show toward others. Do you know why it is that we find it so difficult to love as Jesus commanded? I'll give you the answer (and this my second point) – our ability to love comes from our relationship with Jesus Christ.

"We love because he first loved us", says the Apostle John. We are able to love because he loves us. Understanding this is critical to our ability to live out the Christian life of love. Love does not happen in a vacuum. Love is something that is passed from one person to another.

This is one reason (*Christian*) parents are so important. A child who does not receive love, psychologists tell us, will not be able to give love. Until the person is taught to love

On the other hand, a child who has received the proper amount of nurturing as an infant and as a toddler will have a sense of security and trust that will last them all their lives. You see how the love that children show is dependent of the love they receive from their parents. In order to show Christ-like love, we need to receive that love from Christ.

To love as Jesus commands us in our text today means that we need to immerse ourselves in his Word and Sacraments and to let the love of Christ enter our lives and empower us to love, serve and work together.

We will come to realize more and more our place in God's family and cast off everything that is opposed to love – things like impatience, selfishness, greed, an uncaring attitude, an unforgiving spirit and be led by the Spirit and be more Christ-like in everything we say and do.

**Thirdly:** It is interesting to note that love is the Christian's primary witness to the world. Jesus said, *"If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples."* Our husbands, our wives, our children, our friends and our neighbours will know we are Christ's followers if we have love for them and for everyone we meet.

- Love has well defined characteristics in the Bible. *St Paul* describes love like this:
- Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud;
- love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable;
- love does not keep a record of wrongs;
- love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth.
- Love never gives up; and its faith, hope, and patience never fail (*1 Cor. 13:4-7*).

As I said love has some very definite qualities and it is these qualities that people notice. Love changes our family, our world, our life. Love produces love. How often do people say to you, *"I'm impressed with the way you love other people"*?

You must be a Christian." *Do people see the love of Jesus shining through us?* Is it obvious that there is something different about us that make people wonder, "What is it that makes that person so lovable and so easy to get on with"?

My late sister in law Barbara once told me this narrative, "One of the guys she worked with was one of the kindest people she had ever met in northern Alberta. In a place where people were usually concerned only for themselves, Mike's gentle humour and willingness to help others was appreciated by all of them.

One day, Mike and Barb struck up a conversation, and she discovered that he was active in his church as a Jehovah Witness. She was impressed that his love for others was so obvious that it was the first thing she had noticed about him. *"If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples."*

It doesn't take too much imagination to realize that this command of Jesus is one that we take too lightly. To love as Jesus loves us seems way out of our reach for most of us.

To let love rule everything we say and do, seems almost impossible. How, then, can we hear these words differently? What can provoke us from our *distractions*, our *inattentiveness*, our *numbness*, and call us to action?

God almighty continues to create..... but do we see? By actively loving others, especially the *unlovable*, through our words and actions, we are co-creating with God to bring the new earth into our present existence, now.

There is joy and goodness to be experienced, divisions among people to be repaired, brokenness healed. Will every moment be as running through fields of roses and daisies - not even close. But by shaking ourselves out of *complacency*, and becoming a partner with God, the Church, and each other, we can change the tiny parcel of this mortal home we inhabit.

Anguish and anger within us could be *no more*. We *can* create love that heals or at least patches up hurts, love that warms an angry heart, that soothes the cries of grief, that finds help, food, shelter, or just a hand to hold. Even when rejected, as we will be, there will be another to love and someone to love us.

And we are called to love one another as we are loved by Christ. In the face of so much it seems like so little yet if we give ourselves to it much more will come of it.

Who am I to hinder God working in me? A British theologian: C.S. Lewis puts things more bluntly: *There have been some who were so occupied in spreading Christianity that they never gave a thought to Christ...It is the subtlest of all snares.* To truly follow Jesus, to be known as a sincere disciple, all we truly need is love.

We need his unconditional, never-failing love to forgive us for our lack of love. Thank God that Jesus doesn't love us like we love others. Jesus' love for us creates the potential, template, or model for us to love unconditionally and sacrificially.

My hope for you and for me today is that we may love as Christ has loved us.

**Amen.**

**Prayer concerns:** *Matilda Molyneaux-Piper, Shirley Walker, Hanne Bourgeoise, Sven Berg, Astrid Hylland, Ellen Eriksen, Euclide & Ellen Dahal-Lanteigne, Karen Abazio, Wilhelmina Tiemersma, Matilda Molyneaux-Piper, Soo Young, Shirley Walker, Pastor Timothy, Sharon Nielson (in Herbert, Sask.) the dire tension between Russia and Ukraine, Protectors at various places in Canada, Covid -19 patients, essential and Frontline workers, Note: of thanks to God as the Covid-19 virus is easing off and more restrictions are being lifted, and finally Families of departed souls in recent weeks and months.*

**Prayer:** Glorified Christ, Son of God and Man, embolden us to be purposeful instruments of the continuous flow of Your limitless love. Guide our hearts to joyfully participate in the perpetual renewal of Your Creation, through our own repentance and love, that will lead us to unending life in You. **Amen.**

**Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:**

- **Praise to the Lord, the Almighty # 858**
- **O God of Mercy, God of Light # 714**
- **Christ is Made the Sure Foundation # 644**

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

*Glenn Cleaver*

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

n/a

**Love one another as I have Loved you**

May 15, 2022