

JESUS' NEW COMMAND: "LOVE ONE ANOTHER"

John 13:18-38

Key Verses: 34-35, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

John chapters 13-17 are Jesus' last words in private to his disciples before his death. They are Jesus' last will and testament. What would Jesus say to them?

In the last passage we saw that Jesus demonstrated his humility and love for them by washing their dirty feet, taking the role of a servant. Did you wash someone's feet this week, even figuratively speaking? I picked up a 13-gallon bag of some neighborhood trash this week. But that's a bit easier than bearing with someone's failings. How about the other way around? Did you expose your dirty feet to someone in the hope that they would wash your feet? In other words, did you confess your sin and ask for their forgiveness? Jesus said we should do this as his followers. As Jesus has washed our dirty feet and borne our weaknesses and sins, we should bear with and forgive others' mistakes and failings against us. Forgiving others and asking for forgiveness is important and necessary in a healthy Christian relationship.

Today's passage is a continuation of the last passage. They are still in the upper room in Jerusalem at Jesus' Last Supper. Jesus makes two painful predictions: one of his disciples would betray him and Peter would disown him. In the midst of this, Jesus was confident that God was being glorified. Jesus also gave his disciples a new command: "Love one another." Let's listen to Jesus and draw nearer to him through this passage of Scripture.

First, Judas chose the darkness (18-30). We, the reader, know from verse 2 that the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus. In fact, we have had hints throughout the gospel that Judas would betray Jesus. In John 6:70-71 Jesus said to his disciples, "'Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!' (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)"

Jesus washed his disciples' feet, showing his patient love, mercy and forgiveness toward them. Jesus told them that they would be blessed if they did likewise, washing one another's feet. Then Jesus said some words that weighed heavily on his heart. Look at verse 18.

"I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture: 'He who shared my bread has turned against me.'" Jesus quoted Psalm 41, a psalm of David. David wrote, "Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me." To share bread, eating from the same loaf, meant to trust someone as a friend. Jesus gave Judas the right hand of fellowship. Jesus trusted Judas to be keeper of the money bag among the twelve disciples. Jesus loved Judas like his own brother

or like an eldest son. But Judas was about to turn against Jesus. We are all either for Jesus or against him.

Once young man eavesdropped on a campus Bible study outside. He heard the Bible teacher say, "Jesus said that we are either for him or against him." At that moment, it was clear to this young man that these people studying the Bible were for Jesus. Then he had to consider where he stood. Was he for Jesus or against Jesus? That young man eventually decided to be for Jesus. He is Greg Laurie, the famous evangelist and pastor. Eventually everyone must decide whether they are for Jesus or against Jesus. There's no middle ground. We are either Jesus' friend or Jesus' foe.

Jesus continued speaking to his disciples: "I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am. Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me" (19-20).

Jesus knew that his disciples would be shocked by Judas' betrayal. So he warned them in advance. Jesus wanted his disciples to know that he himself was not a victim of unforeseen evil. Jesus knew exactly what would happen to him. Jesus was simply following God's will and plan. Still, Jesus' heart was heavy.

After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me" (21). Now Jesus told them openly that there was a traitor in their midst. Jesus wanted them to know that Jesus was simply obeying God's perfect will for our salvation. Jesus did not use his power or wisdom to stop his betrayer. Even so, the disciples were dismayed. They stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant (22). They had no clue that it was Judas Iscariot. Judas must've been a good actor. He had all the appearance of being a faithful and true disciple of Jesus. But Jesus knew his heart. Jesus saw right through him. Let this be a warning to us. We can fool people and appear to be good Christians. But we cannot fool Jesus if we are trying to hide in sin and deception. Jesus cannot be fooled. No one can lie to God and get away with it. So what must we do? We must confess our sins and turn from them. We must cry out to Jesus for his mercy and forgiveness for our condemnable words, actions and motives.

One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to Jesus. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means" (23-24).

The reclining and leaning needs some explanation. Dinner tables were different than the tables and chairs of today. Tables were low to the ground. To eat, people reclined at the table, leaning on one elbow and eating with the other hand. So if Jesus was leaning to the left then the beloved disciple would've been on his right, with his head near Jesus' chest. Leaning back against Jesus, this beloved disciple asked Jesus quietly, "Lord, who is it?" (25)

Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot (26).

Judas was within reach of Jesus. It may be that Judas was on Jesus' left. When Jesus gave Judas bread it was an act of love. It also meant that Judas could not hide his intentions any more, at least not from Jesus.

What happened next? As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him, "What you are about to do, do quickly" (27). Jesus did not run away and Jesus did not fight Judas. Jesus stood his ground. Jesus was determined to glorify God and do what God directed. Jesus said, "What you are about to do, do quickly."

But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor (28-29). The disciples were all fooled by Judas. But Jesus was not fooled. Verse 30 says, "As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night." One Bible scholar called this the low point of John's gospel. Jesus' own disciple rejected the light of the world and chose the darkness. May none of us be so foolish to turn against Jesus. Rather, may we all continually turn from sin and follow Jesus, the light of the world.

Second, Jesus resolved to glorify God (31-32). It must've been a most discouraging moment for Jesus when Judas went out into the night. But Jesus did not despair. Jesus fixed his eyes and thoughts on God and his glory. Look at verses 31-32. When Judas was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once." In these two short sentences, Jesus repeated the word "glorified" or "glorify" five times. Jesus' mind, heart and soul were set on glorifying God. Jesus was doing everything for God's glory. Apostle Paul wrote, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1Co 10:31). The Westminster Catechism states: "What is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever."

Jesus' whole life was set on bringing glory, honor and praise to God his Father in heaven. If Jesus had been focused on Satan's work in Judas, he could've been so discouraged or even derailed from his mission. But at the critical moment Jesus looked at God and resolved to glorify God. We saw this earlier in 12:27-28 when Jesus said, "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."

We learn from Jesus that when our hearts are troubled and things look dark, that is the critical moment to turn to the Lord to find strength to glorify his name.

Third, Jesus commanded his disciples to "love one another" (33-35). Jesus now turned his attention fully to his disciples. Judas was gone from their midst. His faithful disciples were left, there with him. Jesus said to them, "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

We note that Jesus called them "my children." They were his beloved disciples. He loved them like a father loves each of his children. They were all precious to him. We are all precious to the Lord Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd, our Everlasting Father. Jesus was going away and they could not follow now. But he gave them a going away command and he repeated it three times. What was it? Three words. "Love one another."

Jesus called it "a new command." Why was it new? We know that Jesus taught that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. And the second greatest commandment is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said that all the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments (Mt 22:37-40). Love God and love people.

This command is similar: "love one another." Like loving God and loving people it also involves love. But it is more specific. It was spoken to Jesus' committed, faithful disciples. "Love one another." Jesus wanted them to love one another. Jesus wanted them to love one another like brothers, like family. This is not easy or natural. American culture is very individualistic, focused on our own careers, and our own families. Beyond our own families, we are not so culturally obligated. Sometimes, even family members don't look after each other very well. So Jesus' words challenge us and our culture today. Actually, Jesus' words challenge every culture on earth. Why? Because we are inherently selfish and self-centered. But love is selfless. Love is more mindful, thoughtful and focused on the one you love, rather than yourself. Isn't that what true love is?

Apostle Paul described love so excellently (1Co 13:4-8a): "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."

How are Jesus' disciples to love one another? Jesus said to them, "as I have loved you, so you must love one another." How had Jesus loved them? That's a good question and not easy to answer in light of John's gospel. But we can review a few ways Jesus loved them.

Jesus loved them by calling them into divine hope rather than judging them. The disciples were full of weaknesses and they had many blindspots. But Jesus didn't regard them as hopeless or wicked. Jesus looked at Nathanael and said, "Here is a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false." Jesus looked at Peter

and said, "You will be called 'Rock'." Do we see other fellow Christians with divine hope, patient love, mercy and forgiveness? This is what Jesus wants us to do: love one another.

Jesus loved them by including them in the divine mission. From the start Jesus called them into divine mission: "Come, and you will see." "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" Do we see our brothers and sisters in Christ as precious coworkers and teammates in the gospel mission? Or do we see others as competitors or even as people who are in our way? May God save us from such narrow-minded, self-centered judgment and help us to love one another.

Jesus loved them by inviting them to be with him. Again, Jesus invited them saying, "Come, and you will see." Jesus invited them to spend the day with him. Jesus invited them into life with him. It's easy to invite people into life with Jesus. But do we invite people into life with ourselves? Again, this challenges the individualism of our culture. We like our privacy and our own space. What a beautiful thing it is when people open up their homes and their lives in the name of Jesus.

Jesus also loved them by washing their dirty feet. Ultimately, Jesus loved them by dying for their sins. I'm sure you can think of other ways Jesus loved his disciples which we can imitate. It's also good to think about how Jesus loved you personally and to show that kind of love to others. I think that is the real key to loving others. We love ultimately only from the love we have realized and received from Jesus and from others. 1 John 4:19 says, "We love because he first loved us."

So how has Jesus loved you? I think we all can testify, if we are honest, that Jesus has loved us patiently and mercifully and by no means do we deserve it. We call this grace. Jesus also did not leave us in our sins, rebellion and deception. Rather, he brought us into the truth. He brought us out of darkness into his light, out of aloneness into his love. Jesus loved us with grace and truth. Jesus loved us with his light and with his love.

Jesus says one more thing here in verse 35: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Jesus says that this love for one another is what identifies his disciples. Are you a disciple of Jesus? This is not a multiple choice question. Some people think there are Christians and there are disciples of Jesus, who are at a higher level. But the Bible makes no distinction between Christians, believers and disciples. They are all one and the same.

In John 8:31 Jesus defined who is disciple saying, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples." So the condition there was to "hold" to Jesus' teaching. Here, Jesus says his disciples are those who "love one another," which of course, is one of his teachings.

So what identifies a Christian? Is it wearing a cross necklace? No. Is it going to church every Sunday? No, but that is a good thing. Is it reading the Bible daily or memorizing Bible verses? Again, those are good things but they are not what

Jesus says identifies his disciples. There are many good things we can do to identify and grow as Christians. But what is most important according to Jesus is that we love one another. Apostle Paul said if we do not have love, then we are nothing and we gain nothing (1Co 13:2,3). So, brothers and sisters, let us as disciples of Jesus strive to love one another, as he commanded us and as he still wants us to do.

Fourth, Peter depended on his own bravado (36-38). So Jesus gave the beautiful new command: "love one another." Peter heard Jesus' words but those were not the words that he was thinking about. Rather, Simon Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later." Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!"

Peter's heart was right. He loved Jesus. He was not a traitor like Judas. But he didn't know his own weaknesses, like Jesus knew him. In a moment of weakness Peter would cave in to fear. We learn from Peter that depending on our own strength, determination or courage has great limitations. If we depend on ourselves, we will eventually fail. Where does our help come from? Our help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

In this passage Jesus predicted two sad and difficult events regarding his disciples: Judas would betray him and Peter would disown him. Still, Jesus' heart was set on glorifying God. In the midst of his sorrow, Jesus gave his disciples a new command: love one another. If they loved one another, they would defeat the devil's work. If they loved one another, they would show the world that they were disciples of Jesus. If they loved one another, they would glorify God. May God help us to love our brothers and sisters in Christ as Jesus' disciples, as Jesus has loved us. Amen.