

"A New Commandment"

May 18, 2025

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: John 13: 34-35

Jesus begins our Scripture reading with the words, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another." Now at first glance, loving one another is not a new commandment. If we flip back 1002 pages in our pew Bibles and 1400 years of history, we find ourselves in Leviticus 19:18 that says, "Love your neighbor as yourself," which is also the second half of the great commandment. The command to love on another had been around 5.5 times longer than the United States of America has been a nation. Not exactly new. It is the next sentence that makes the commandment new. "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

Now most of us learn things like how to love from our parents, families, and the people who surround us. And when we hear the Bible say, "love your neighbor as yourself," we think we know what that means. But eventually we realize our definition is too small. For example, I grew up in a family of coaches. Whether we were talking about sports or papers in schools or music concerts or being silly in the backyard, responses included both praise and constructive criticism. "Excellent game, Mike. If that shot would have been another foot to the left, you would have scored a goal." "I liked your report. Now if we can just work on your spelling." "You were a little flat on the chorus, but your rhythm and tempo were right on." Amy, on the other hand, grew up in a family of cheerleaders. "You did a great job!" "I just loved it!" "You sang so beautifully." "That is so pretty!" All is good in newly wed world until we visit extended family. My mom and sister really enjoyed Amy and invite her to help them clean-up in the kitchen after dad cooked. They cherish the time with her, but it became obvious Amy didn't know the correct way to load the dishwasher, so they shared it with her. Amy's cheerleader family background hears the criticism and thinks, "I can't even load a dishwasher right. They think I'm an idiot." On the flip side, I am trying to design a magazine rack for Amy's mom's bathroom and no matter what I propose and present, she says, "Oh, that is wonderful." No, this is an original design specifically for you and your bathroom. I need some constructive criticism. I need to know what you think. "Oh, that is going to be so nice." No, help me get it right. Amy and I have both had to grow beyond "love your neighbor as yourself" because how I feel love and affirmation, and how Amy feels love and affirmation, are not the same. There is even a book about learning other people's love language.

So Jesus gives us a new commandment. Not just "love your neighbor as yourself," but "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." We need to love like Jesus loves.

So what does love look like in Jesus' family? We get a little help in answering that from the passage's context. Jesus has just shared His last meal with His disciples. Before that

meal, He took a towel and a wash basin and washed His disciples' feet. The Son of God took the role of the lowest servant or the youngest child in the house. He served them by doing the most menial, mundane task of the day. Loving like Jesus includes humble servitude. After supper, Jesus was arrested, beaten, tried, and put to death on the cross in order to pay for and thereby take away the sins of every person on earth who would ask. He suffered and died for our sins so we don't have to. You don't get any bigger or more heroic than that. Did you put the before and after supper scenes together? This "new commandment" – this loving like Jesus loves – is not only active and sacrificial, but extends from the mundane to the heroic and encompasses every kind of self-giving act in between. We are not talking about a feeling of affection or even liking the other person. We are talking about active, sacrificial actions of kindness and empowerment that reach from the menial to the heroic and everything in between. "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

Yet the context doesn't just tell us how to love like Jesus, it tells us who to love like Jesus. Like I said, this comes between Jesus washing the disciples' feet and His crucifixion. Let that sink in a moment. Jesus washed the feet of each disciple. He washed the feet of Peter, knowing Peter would soon deny Him three times. He washed the feet of Judas, right before dismissing Judas to go and betray Him. He washed the feet of each disciple knowing those same feet would soon be running away in fear as they abandoned Him in the garden. Yet He washed them. After this scene, things moved quickly through Jesus' arrest, trial, beatings and crucifixion. And what did Jesus say from the cross to the very people who arrested Him, tried Him, beat Him and crucified Him? "Forgive them Father, for they do not know what they are doing." The love that Jesus demonstrates is certainly not based on the merit of the recipients. It is based on who Jesus is.

And that is the third thing He is sharing with us in these 2 verses. Jesus says loving this way – loving who Jesus loves and how Jesus loves – is how everyone will know you are His disciples. Most Christians do not have a uniform they wear that sets them apart from everyone else. Christians do not all root for the same sports teams or belong to the same political party. They don't have their own language or their own place that they live and work. We don't carry a badge or have distinctive shoes or claim the same socio-economic bracket. How will you know you have come upon a fellow Jesus follower and how will they know you? By how we love. If you see them pouring themselves out in service for the sake of others – doing everything from the most menial to the most heroic task with the same sense of purpose and joy – you have found a Jesus follower. And if they see you doing the same to people you like, people you don't like, and people you do not even know; they will have found a fellow follower. Jesus could not be clearer. It is not by our theological correctness, not by our moral purity, and not by our impressive knowledge that everyone will know that we are His disciples. It is by our love.

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Mike Van Heyningen