

Sermon: Our Commandment to Love

Isn't it interesting that Jesus gives his disciples this incredible command to love each other on the heels of Judas walking out the door to betray him? After all, Judas was a man full of greed, selfish ambition, and hostility towards Jesus.

And you can't help but see a connection between the fact that Judas had no love for Jesus, and Jesus' command to his disciples to love one another. It is worth noting the fact that this command comes right after Judas walks out. It's almost as if Jesus is telling his disciples not to be full of hatred like Judas, but rather to be filled with love like him.

The reality is the love you give reflects the love you've received. The love that flows out of you reveals the sort of love that has flowed into you. Maybe you have a hard time showing love because you felt like it was never really shown to you, or perhaps you go above and beyond to show love to make up for what you didn't have growing up.

The Christian should strive to demonstrate love that goes far beyond your personal experience. The love that the Christian displays should be a small taste of the love that he or she has received from Christ.

And in our passage, we see three things: first we're given a model for sacrificial love, second, we're commanded to love, and lastly, we're reminded that our love should be bathed in humility.

And obviously, the model of sacrificial love comes to us all through the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the physical embodiment of love. And Judas really represents the opposite, doesn't he? Hatred and hostility towards Jesus.

It's worth noting that as soon as Judas walks out of the upper room to go betray Jesus, Jesus immediately begins to address the disciples. That "hour" that Jesus has spoken of so often has finally arrived. Because in a

few moments, Jesus is going to go to Gethsemane where he'll be met by Roman soldiers, his enemies, and Judas who will betray him with a kiss. Then Jesus is put on trial where he'll be sentenced and make his way to the cross. The "hour" is no longer at some point in the distant future, rather, it was upon them.

And of course, his time with his disciples is quickly coming to an end. Which is why he says what he says, "Now the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once."

In other words, the plan has been set in motion for him to go to the cross which was to his glory. Judas has left, he's going to gather the troops to arrest Jesus, and shortly after that he'll head to the cross. Everything is in place.

And knowing that in a few short hours that his earthly relationship with his disciples would soon be over, addresses his disciples as "children." To call an adult a "child" today might offend someone, but of course, Jesus isn't insulting his disciples. He's using fatherly language to speak to them tenderly and share his love for them.

Jesus and only Jesus could atone for our sins and accomplish redemption for God's people on the cross. No one else could do it. And his seat at the right hand of God the Father Almighty is reserved for him alone.

They cannot come with him. No one else could do it. And of course this is true for every Christian here this morning. But in that moment, it was personal, because Jesus was about to endure the cross for those disciples in that room.

The fact that he's about to be glorified, the fact that the disciples cannot go with him, all of that is a reference to the cross!

Jesus wasn't just going to give them a great working definition of love. Rather, he was going to embody it for them. He was going to demonstrate it for them. Isn't that precisely what the cross is? The essence, the embodiment, the ultimate picture or image of love?

Who models love for you? Is it Jesus?

The love that Christ displayed on the cross is selfless sacrifice, it's humility, it's laying down your rights and privileges, it's putting others ahead of yourself.

The model of Christ is greater than any definition because his example is applicable to any circumstance. If you're a Christian, then what would it look like for you to model the sacrificial love of Christ in your marriage, with your kids, or at work?

And here's what's so interesting about the love that Jesus displayed: we're commanded to reflect it. According to Jesus, loving one another isn't an optional component of the Christian faith. It's a requirement. Or to put it in his words: it's a commandment.

It's interesting that Jesus calls it a "new" commandment because there really isn't anything new about it. The people of the Old Testament were commanded to love as well.

Leviticus 19:18 says, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord."

So, what made what Jesus was saying, "new?"

Perhaps, most obviously, it's new because Jesus holds himself up as our example for love. Because never had there been a person who had perfectly exemplified Biblical love.

That's the sort of love that Jesus commands to you and me as well. Easy, right?

Remember, Jesus is speaking to his disciples, but his words are certainly relevant to the covenant community, that is, the church as well. His command to love has a particular application in mind, the church! Jesus is saying that the love within the church should be special, unique, and praiseworthy.

We're all called to demonstrate the love of Christ to one another. To put it even more simplistically, the church should be the place that you walk into and, for lack of a better way of putting it, **feel the love!**

Love should be unmistakable within the walls of the church. Sacrificial love and service should be self-evident.

The humble, sacrificial love that Christ demonstrated is what the Christian must imitate, notwithstanding, in a much smaller imperfect way. And it's the Christians' love that should make them different.

I'm sure many of us have experienced a church that was lacking the feeling of love, but on the other hand, I hope you've experienced a warm loving congregation as well, like St. Andrew's Stirling.

The church's love for one another serves as a testimony to the world around us!

The love that you have received from the Lord should be the love that you give. And it should be evident in every relationship. God's love should be diffused throughout your life and my life. It should be something that people outside of the church should notice. Unbelievers should look at love within the church and wish they had what we have.

Jesus reminds us that the love we've received should be the love that we give. The aroma of love should follow the Christian into every sphere of his

or her life, but think about it, if we all share that same sweet smell, shouldn't it be strongest, right here? In the church?

The love that the church has for one another should be profound. It should be so evident that you should be able to reach out and touch it! This should be one of the defining features of our church. And I am quite happy to say, it is!

Sometimes churches get labeled. That church has great music. That church has good preaching. That church has a beautiful building. That church has a welcoming congregation. And I know you're already thinking we have all those things, but one label that isn't an option is that it's a warm, loving, church. Jesus doesn't give us that option.

Our love for one another must run deep because Jesus said, "Just as I have loved you, St. Andrew's Stirling, so love one another. If the love of Christ means anything to you, then you must love.

Therefore, go out of your way to show your love. Sacrifice, serve, and even inconvenience yourself to show others that you care and love them. And in so doing, we bear witness to the reality and power of the gospel in our lives! Amen.