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Love One Another As I Have Loved You
John 13:31-35

Today we go back to the Last Supper, where Jesus gives his disciples the bread and cup, telling them it is his body and blood.

The same supper where Jesus washed their feet.

Jesus does all this, knowing that ***Judas would betray him, and Peter deny him***. This passage comes just after Jesus says to Judas, "Do quickly what you are going to do."²⁸

When Judas had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him.³² If God has been glorified in him,³³ God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.³³ Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

What would you say to those around you,
if you knew you were about to die?

What would you like to ***say to the world***, before your death?

Would you talk about your love?

It's a ***cliché*** question, until you ***really stop to consider it***.

What would you say?

What if you left this place today, and did just that?

This passage today, this new commandment,

Was Jesus' dying wish.

These are some of the ***most important words*** from Jesus to his disciples, and to us over 2000 years later.

Jesus knows he is about to go to the cross,

and he uses that time to say what is deepest in his heart.

He tells them exactly ***how he wants them to live*** after he's gone.

Did you notice what Jesus *does NOT say?*

It doesn't say you need to worship in this kind of church,
or believe the correct doctrine.

He doesn't even say read God's word and pray every day!

It's much more *basic*.

It's the *essence* of who we are as disciples of Jesus.

Our essence is love.

Not a 'right' doctrine,
or style of worship or music,
not a 'right' way to pray or study.

The essence of who we are,
and who we are to be is *LOVE*.

And did you notice *what Jesus called this?*

He said I give you a *new commandment*.

This is NOT just a good idea for Christian living.

This is not a suggestion.

It's not even a choice!

It's a new commandment---*an obligation to all who follow Jesus*.

If we want to obey Jesus, we obey by loving others.

This is what Jesus *wants for the world* when he is gone—
not punishment, wrath, or judgment, but love.

So this is *good news, right?*

Our primary calling is to love others.

Sounds simple, right?

Until we realize there are *no exceptions for* this commandment.

It is a commandment.

An order.

A law.

Jesus has already taught that the Greatest commandments
are to love God and neighbor as yourself.

Love is the *essence* of Jesus' ministry and mission.

And it is the essence of who a disciple is called to be.

But here at the Last Supper, Jesus is ***taking it a step further***.
 Because ***HOW*** are we to love?
Just like Jesus loves us.

And what does that mean?
 The word for love that Jesus uses is ***agape*** in Greek—
 which means ***unconditional love***.
 A ***Godly*** love.
 It is the same word used to describe God's love for us.
 We are to love with agape love.
 Wow.

That's sobering.
 I don't know about you, ***but I have failed*** to love EVERYONE AND ANYONE
 with agape love.
 Loving like that can ***feel impossible*** at times, right?
 Don't we all have people we do cannot love?

New Testament scholar D.A Carson says: *"This new command is simple enough for a toddler to memorize and appreciate, and yet it is profound enough that the most mature believers are repeatedly embarrassed at how poorly they comprehend it and put it into practice."*

G.K Chesterton once wrote that
*"The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting.
 It has been found difficult and left **untried**."*
 Isn't that so true?
 We know we are to love—really love—everyone, and yet we fail.

So what do we do?

How can we obey this new commandment?

I like what I read this week in Journey with Jesus by Debie Thomas:
But here's our saving grace: Jesus doesn't leave us alone and bereft. We are not direction-less in the wilderness. He gives us a road map, a clear and beautiful way forward: "As I have loved you." Follow my example, he says. Do what I do. Love as I love. Live as you have seen me live. From "If You Love" by Debie Thomas, *Journey with Jesus*, 2019

HOW did Jesus love?

We know he loved by offering ***hope and healing***,
to all those who were sick and downtrodden.

He brought sight to the blind, healing to lepers, health to the crippled,
hearing to the deaf, and restoration to all who were left out.

How do we bring hope and healing to others?

We know he loved ***without judgment, shame, and scorn***.

He loved with ***grace, forgiveness, and the chance to start over*** again.

How do we love with grace and forgiveness?

Remember the ***woman at the well*** who had lived with several different men?

Instead of offering her shame or punishment,
he offered her living water, and His grace, and love.

Remember the ***woman caught in adultery***,
brought to Jesus by a group of men? What did Jesus do?
He said he who is without sin should cast the first stone.
And they all walked away.

When they were gone Jesus gently told the woman,
neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more.

It's ***grace and love that he extends to even his enemies***,

as he serves Judas at the Last Supper,
the one he knows will betray him,
and Peter, who he knows will deny him three times!

Jesus' love was expansive—it reached well beyond
his circle of friends and family,
to those on the very edges of society,
to marginalized persons who were excluded or forgotten by everyone else.

Loving like that is hard, isn't it?

It's one thing to put on a loving facade,
Or to SAY we love.

It's not easy to really love one another, ***inside or outside*** the church.

It's not easy to love people who ***betray or abandon*** us.

It's not easy to love those who ***seem unlovable***.

And yet Jesus tells us to really love, the way we are loved by Him.

Which means we must be **real, and vulnerable**.

When we really love---it means we can get hurt.

Jesus DID get hurt.

C. S. Lewis put it this way, "*To love at all is to be vulnerable.*

Love anything, and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken.

If you want to be sure of keeping your heart intact—

you must give it to no one, ...Lock it up safely in the casket of selfishness.

And in that casket, ... it will not be broken. It will become unbreakable, impenetrable and irredeemable.

*The only place outside of heaven where you can be perfectly safe from the dangers of love is hell."(from *The Four Loves*)*

If we love, our hearts can be broken.

They WILL be broken sometimes.

Because people hurt people.

We're sinners, fallen, broken, and imperfect.

We've all been hurt, and we've all taken that out on someone else.

But we always have a **CHOICE** with love.

We can become bitter, and lock up our hearts into a living hell

Or we can walk with God through our hurts,

And grow through in our love.

Mother Teresa describes it like this,

*"I have found ... that if I love **until it hurts**,
then there is no more hurt, but only more love".*

In **I Kings 3:16-18** two women are **fighting over a baby**.

During the night one woman's son had died,

so she took another woman's baby and tried to pass it off as her own, leaving the dead child with the other mother.

Wise King Solomon was asked to determine the real mother of the living child, and he did so by threatening to **cut the baby** in half...

knowing that the real mother would rather give away her son than have him killed.

And that's exactly what happened.

The real mother said take him...

True love was the ***love willing to give up*** her only son.

Sound familiar?

Jesus wants us to love with ***that kind of love***.

And so many times it feels ***impossible to do---on our own***.

Which is why ***we don't have to do it alone***.

We rely upon our relationship with Jesus,

We ***allow His love to flow*** through us.

We don't have to conjure up love for others,

We give our desire to love---to Jesus,

and ***ask for the grace and power to extend it*** in to those around us.

I love how Debie Thomas said this in Journey with Jesus:

*In other words, Jesus's commandment to us is not that we should wear ourselves out, trying to conjure love from our own easily depleted resources. Rather, it's that we're invited to abide in the holy place where all love originates. We can **make our home in Jesus's love** — the most abundant and inexhaustible love in existence. **Our love is not our own; it is God's, and God our source is without limit, with out end.*** From "If You Love" by Debie Thomas, *Journey with Jesus*, 2019

When I read the new commandment of Jesus,

I think about what Jesus says in ***John 15***,

I wonder if he was ***explaining how to love?***

In John 15: 4-5 Jesus says, ***Abide in me as I abide in you.***

Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches.

Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing

Could this be the ***key to us obeying*** the new commandment to love?

I sure hope so!

We want to love, don't we?

And yet we fail, right?

So who can we turn to?

What about the one who IS LOVE.
Our God, who IS love. Our Savior who IS Love.

It's why loving one another was **Jesus' dying wish**.
It's the **most important thing** he wanted his followers to know and do.
Because he was love personified.
Jesus was the way we know God's love for us.
And his disciples' love is the **way His life, and spirit live on**.

Loving like Jesus is beyond important.
Because it's **our witness**.
It's our calling card.
It's the thing that **other people will notice**—whether we are loving, or not.
*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,
if you have love for one another."*

This is the **power of love**.
It's a serious **responsibility**, isn't it?

Did you know that near the end of his life,
Martin Luther King, Jr. said that he didn't want to be remembered
for his work, or his awards, or his accomplishments.
He wanted to be remembered for one thing---**his love**.
*"I'd like somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to give
his life serving others. I'd like for somebody to say that day that Martin Luther
King Jr. tried to love somebody.*

What do you hope people say about you?
And who is **watching** the way you love?
Who is **watching our church**, and the way we love?
Does **the world see** that we are Jesus' disciples---by our love?

There is a story in the book *Out of Africa* about a boy named **Kitau**.
He appears at the Danish author's door one day to ask for a job as a servant.
Isak Dinesen hires him but is surprised when 3 months later he asks for a
letter of recommendation to Sheik Ali Bin Salim,
a Muslim who lives in a nearby town.
Dinesen offers to raise his pay to keep him,
but money was not his interest.

Kitau had decided to either ***become a Christian or a Muslim***,
and his purpose in working for Dinesen
had been to see ***how a Christian lived***.

Now that he had worked for a Christian he wanted to see how Muslims live,
then he would decide.

The author remembers how she wished Kitau would have told her that before
he came to live with her!

Gary D. Jones, Feasting on the Word, Year C Vol 2, pg. 472.

The truth is, people are ***watching*** what we say and do,
whether we realize it or not.

And what they witness ***tells them a lot*** about Christianity.

Arthur Simon, founder of Bread for the World, says that his father,
who grew up on a farm in Wisconsin, taught him this:

"Even the cows should know you are a Christian by the way you treat them."

Everyone should know we are Christians,
By the way we love them.

Is that ***true*** of us?

Do all those ***living in our house*** know we are Christians by our love?

What about at our workplaces? In our community? In this church?

Do the people who know you are a Christian
see it by the way you live?

Or do we ***say one thing and live*** another?

It reminds me of the man from Katy, Texas, who needed some same-
day dry cleaning before he left on a trip.

He remembered one store with a huge sign, ***"One-Hour Dry Cleaners,"***
on the other side of town, so he drove out of his way to drop off a suit.

After filling out the tag, he told the clerk, "I need this in an hour."

She said, "I can't get this back to you until Thursday."

"I thought you did dry cleaning in an hour?"

"No," she replied, ***"That's just the name of the store."***

Do we just carry the ***name Christian***,

Or do we really, truly love like Christians?

It's a ***tall order***, to love like Jesus.
But he wouldn't have asked it of us if it was impossible.
He offered himself as our ***model***, and our ***source of strength***.

Love was so important, that it was ***Jesus' dying wish***.
Is it ours?

What would you say to those around you, if you knew you were dying?
Would you tell those around you just how much you love them?
Would we encourage others to love one another?

Friends, hear the ***Good News of the Gospel*** today:
We have seen ***love in the flesh***, in Jesus Christ.
We have been called to love, ***as He did***.
This is the way ***everyone will know*** we are Christians—by our love.
And for that love, all God's people said, Amen.