

May 19, 2019

## **New Commandment – Love One Another**

### Prayer

May the words of my mouth be mediations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. Oh, Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

### Sermon

As you heard in the beginning of the Gospel, what Jesus is saying to His disciples was at the last supper. It was after Judas had left, but He gives to His disciples a commandment. One that we're very familiar with, one I'm sure you've heard preached on many times. "I give you this commandment to love one another." It's one of the only commandments that Jesus gives to His disciples so directly. "Love one another as I have loved you. You are to love one another." This is something of paramount importance for Him that He wants his disciples to know that this is what they ought to be about. This is what He wants them to carry going forward in their ministry. He knows He is about to leave them. He knows that the path that He is going to have to walk that night and into tomorrow through His passion and through His death on the cross, will lead them to question themselves and question what they are to do and what they are to be about.

He knows that He is not going to be with them other than some resurrection appearances. He's not going to be with them to guide them anymore. So He's trying to give them on that night the things that they need to carry forward. He gives them the example of washing their feet, that they might remember that they're called to be servants. He gives them that final meal where He gives new meaning to the bread and to the wine. "This is My body and this is My blood. Do this in remembrance of me. Be a servant. Participate in the body and blood. Make that a part of who you are," and this final commandment to love one another.

Now as important as that is and how easy it is to actually preach on that part of it. What He says immediately after that, I found particularly interesting now and where we are and where the churches in, not just our society but worldwide. He says to His disciples, the ones that He has chosen, the ones that He knows are born to carry on after Him. He says, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." How important is that? What you are carrying forward, what I want the people to know is what you have learned and when they see you loving one another, they're going to get the message. They will be drawn to that. Not the words that you speak, not any kind of doctrine that I've given you. As you live out being citizens of God's kingdom, as you live out being My disciples, as you are loving one another and I think beyond that, loving everyone. They will know that you are My disciples and that's what they will be drawn to. That's what they will come to.

Now, the first century church was kind of known for that. The very early church. What some of the sources outside of the church says about this new religion, this new thing that's going around is that, these are strange people. They hold their possessions in common. They give to everybody equally. No matter how much you put in, you get enough. These people are different. They are just going out and trying to get the best and the finest people available. They're inviting everybody in. They just let anybody come through the door and be a part of this community. Sinners, non-sinners, although there really weren't any of those. They let the Jews in, they let the gentiles in, they let the orphans in, they let widows in, these people with no significant status in society. They embrace them all and even though

these orphans and widows had nothing to offer as far as properties and such to the church, they just welcome them in. They take care of them. This is an interesting group of people.

What they could have said is, "Wow, these people are loving each other and they're loving everybody who comes through the door. They're not asking for anything specific. They're not looking for a right way of looking at the world or the right kind of faith. They just let everybody in and let it take its course. Isn't that interesting?" Unfortunately, the church didn't maintain that for very long. Also, in the first century church, we had Paul trying to deal with these new communities who are supposed to be living according to love, but what they get caught up in is, well, you know, what's the most important spiritual gift? Who should be the leader? What if they're not living according to the law that we've learned as Jews? What if they're not living with the same morality that we think they should be living with? So they go back to Paul and say, "Straighten all these people out, would you please?"

God love his heart, Paul tries to do that, but he also gets away from that understanding although he tries to teach it. If you remember the 13th chapter of the first letter of Paul, you know, love is patient, love is kind. Tries to get them to understand the same thing that Jesus was telling His disciples. "One commandment, love one another, by this everyone will know that you're my disciples." He tries to reinforce that. The church has not done a very good job of listening to that part where it goes beyond the commandment and it goes to living in the world. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples. Instead of focusing on loving one another beyond the things that separate us, we get so involved in that, we get so involved in what I consider sin, what you consider sin and your sin is worse than mine.

In our church today, we are being torn apart because every branch of the church seems to be saying something a little bit different and it's not about love. It's about believing this way, living that way, making sure that you don't do this, making sure that you do do this. We have so many voices that are so different and they are so mean spirited as they condemn what you're saying, but not what I'm saying. Is it any wonder that we have a generation of young people who say, "You know, I am drawn to God. I am drawn to the knowledge and understanding of a creator. A sustainer of life. I am drawn to a spiritual life, but I can't deal with the church. I don't want to be a part of that because this part of the church says living that way is wrong and sinful and they can't be a part. And it's okay to treat them differently and it's okay to treat them badly because they're not in the right belief. They don't have the same morality. They don't have the same way of looking at life and looking at the church as we have and therefore they don't count. They're not important."

Jesus never got caught up in that. Do you think that the 12 men that He chose out of Israel were sinless? Absolutely not. Chose a tax collector. According to the Jews, that's one of the worst sins that could have been going on because they were collaborating with the Romans. Had a zealot, had fishermen. Now, if you've ever been around fishermen ... Why do think that Peter and the boys were any different? He chose sinners because that's all He had to choose from. He drew them in and said, "We're going to look at life differently and we're going to teach life differently. We're going to try to reach out to people and to love them."

The harshest words that Jesus spoke were not about tax collectors. They were about pharisees and high priests who were giving the people this burden to carry and not doing anything to help them out. The one time that Jesus is confronted with a sinner, where a sinner is brought before Him, and I know you remember the story. A woman is caught in adultery and she is brought before Jesus by this crowd. Now in the law, it says that a person caught in adultery could and should be stoned. That's pretty harsh, and

as a test they bring this poor woman before Jesus. "We caught her in adultery. The law says she should be stoned. What do you say?" Trying to get Him in a position where they could either be against Him for letting her go or they could have a due understanding if He decides that she should be stoned. We're told in the gospel that Jesus seems a little frustrated with the whole thing going on. He kind of bends down and He writes something in the dirt.

He's taken a moment. I think that's because He was so angry with the people that He needed a moment. He stands back up and He says, "Okay, law says she should be stoned. Let the one of you who is without sin cast the first stone." Well, that brought people up, short. Without sin. Let me think about my life a minute. I had my rock ready to throw because she's definitely a sinner, but I'm a sinner too. May not be adultery. Could be idolatry. Could be not following the Sabbath law. Could be not honoring my mother and father. Could be a number of different things. As the crowd thought about their own lives, their own sins that needed to be forgiven, one by one they dropped the rock. They went home.

Now during this time, Jesus has bent down again and He's kind of writing in the dirt. He looks up and the crowd has dispersed, but the woman is still there in front of Him. I don't know if she's waiting for judgment, waiting for Him to speak to her, whatever words He would speak. It was perfect time for her to run away when the crowd dispersed but she stays. He looks up and He gets up. "Well, did anybody here in this crowd condemn you?" "No Sir. Not a one." "Well, neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." She goes home. Now because of where we are in our society and our time, it did occur to me that if this woman was caught in adultery, where was the guy? How come he wasn't brought? Just putting it out there. Some things don't change the way we see sin in some ways.

That's how He dealt with sinners. He cared about her. He didn't care that she committed adultery. He cared but He wasn't going to condemn her. He certainly wasn't going to have her stoned to death because of this. This was her opportunity to go and sin no more. Every time that we are forgiven by God, every time we reach out in love to one another, every time we accept one another as the sinners we are, when we show that love, when we show that care, when we show that concern, then we can say, "Go and sin no more. Do better the next time," because we're all that person. We all come to the altar rail as sinners. But we're forgiven. We're given the opportunity to try to go out and to do better the next time. That's what it is to love one another in such a way that the world can look at that and they say, "That's what I need. I need God's forgiveness.

But I also need the acceptance and love and care and concern for other sinners who have been forgiven, who know what it's like to fail, but to be forgiven and then accepted. To be a part. To know that I'm in a relationship with God and with God's people." That is how we are called, I believe, to live our lives. Comes right after the only commandment that Jesus gave to his disciples. Love one another as I have loved you. That's my commandment, and when you do this, when you do this, then people will know that you are my disciples. It's not about how loudly you cry about this sin which is not your own or that sin. It's about acknowledging the sin of us all. About accepting the fact that we have fallen short and yet God loves us in spite of it, and we are called to love one another in that same way. It is when we do this, that we know and the world knows that we live in a state of grace. That we live in a state of forgiveness. That we live in a state of love.

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