

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

John 13:18-38

Key Verses: 13:34-35

“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”

Our passage this morning takes place in the Upper Room where Jesus and his disciples celebrated the Passover. John writes that “Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father” and he was eager to spend his final hours with his disciples. John continues, saying “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” Part of this love was sharing his final instructions with them.

Just for fun, I did a Google search for famous last words. The results were all over the place. Some people embraced a hedonistic lifestyle to the end. Humphrey Bogart said, “I should have never switched from scotch to martinis.” Another person said, “I just wish I had time for one more bowl of chili.” Others were a little remorseful. Leonardo di Vinci said, “I have offended God and mankind because my work didn’t reach the quality it should have.” Some longed to be with people they had lost. Joe DiMaggio said, “I finally get to see Marilyn.” Others were outright defiant. JoAnne Crawford yelled to her maid, “Don’t you dare ask God to help me.” Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, author of the Sherlock Holmes novels, turned to his wife and said, “You are wonderful” with a smile and died peacefully. After reading through several lists of famous last words, I realized how unique our Lord’s words were to his disciples.

Jesus said, **“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.”** And then, with his final instructions, we see our Lord’s love for his disciples and the whole world. Jesus says, **“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.”** Three times in these two verses alone, Jesus commands his disciples to love one another.

Our Lord’s command goes beyond the 12 disciples that were gathered in that room. His command applies to disciples in every nation and generation. Are we

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

ready to receive and obey the Lord's command? This morning we will think about the nature of love, the standard of love, the witness of love, and the power to love.

First, the nature of love (34a). Love means different things to different people. So what did Jesus mean when he commanded his disciples to love one another? The Greek language has several different words for love. The first is "eros". Eros refers to an intoxicating, impulsive love between a man and a woman. In the context of marriage, it is a wonderful blessing of God. However, this kind of love is based purely on emotion and even in the best of marriages this feeling eventually fades. There comes a day when a husband and a wife look at each other and say, "Eww!" I don't remember who said it first in our marriage, but it was probably my wife as she picked up my dirty socks for the millionth time. We say the "honeymoon is over", but actually it is the time when a deeper love overtakes the relationship. Eros has become an idol in our nation and many devote their lives to pursuing this insatiable lust. The search for eros has led people to enter all kinds of sinful and destructive relationships and it has destroyed thousands of marriages. This is not the kind of love Jesus was talking about.

A second word for love is "philia". This is described as the warm, noble affection of a deep friendship. This too is based on our emotions, which can change over time. I was very excited when my best friend and his wife moved to Chicago just 6 months after I did. It was wonderful news and I thought we would be best friends forever. But over the years, we've gone our separate directions and the friendship we enjoyed is now just a fond memory. Philia love is still not what Jesus was talking about.

The love that is commanded by Jesus is agape love. Eros and Philia cannot be commanded, but agape love is different. Agape love is not based on feelings, but on a conscious and decisive act of our will. Agape love has been described as "a joyful resolve to put the welfare of others above our own." It is a love that that is impossible to have apart from God, because it flows from God and it is who God is.

Agape love is described by Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13. God had blessed the Corinthian church with many spiritual gifts, but they were using them in an unloving way. They were stingy and impatient with each other. Some were

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

filled with pride and boasted about their gifts while others were consumed with envy. Without love, their gifts were meaningless. Paul sought to teach them about the more excellent way of love. In verse 4 of that chapter Paul writes, **“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.”** Agape love is a love that is longsuffering and generous. It is a love that is focused on the needs of others and it is never envious of what they have or what they can do. It never seeks to put others down. Paul continues, **“It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.”** We see that love is unselfish, difficult to provoke, and ready to forgive. Paul says, **“Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth.”** Sometimes we rejoice when something bad happens to others and we feel that the universe has finally justified our cause. But this is wicked. Love is sorrowful for the evil in another’s life and thankful whenever God blesses them. According to Paul, love **“always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”** Agape love is a love that covers the sin of others. It is a love that believes in others, hopes the best for them, and endures throughout every hardship and trial. This is the love we see in Christ and it is the love that He wants you and I to have for each other.

It’s been two years since we moved into our new house. On the first floor, right in the middle, there’s a room I call my “fortress of solitude”. It has a beautiful desk, shelves filled with books, a computer, and noise cancelling headphones. I can easily spend several hours a day in there. I like being a hermit and sometimes I just want the world to leave me alone. However, this is not the way to live a life of love. Love cannot exist in isolation. How can we love others if we don’t know them and spend time with them? How can we love each other if we are not willing to get beyond our differences and forgive each other? How can we experience agape love if we don’t protect each other, trust each other, and have the best hopes for each other? The disciples were fiercely independent and they argued constantly over who was the greatest. But, by the grace of God, they became one in agape love. Such love is Christ’s will for us. Such love is Christ’s command for all of his disciples.

Second, a new standard of love (34b). Jesus says, **“A new command I give you: Love one another.”** But how is this a “new” command? We’ve heard this before! In fact, when an expert in the law asked Jesus to identify which commandment was the greatest, Jesus responded, **“Love the Lord your God**

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” So what is new? Jesus says, “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” What is new is the standard of our love and the example of Christ. We are to love others as Christ has loved us.

So, we have to become students again. We have to study the love of Christ in order for His love to become our own. In John 13, we find 4 different characteristics of His love.

First, Jesus’ love is rooted in humility. Jesus knew that his death, resurrection, and ascension were imminent. He also knew that the Father had given him all authority and power and that he had come from God and that he was going back to God. If that were us, would we waste our time washing somebody’s dirty feet? But look at Jesus! Verses 4-5 say, “**he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.**” As Jesus looked around the room, he realized that not a single one of his disciples would humble themselves. They all felt they were above such a thing and they continued to argue about who was the greatest. But there was Jesus, our Lord and Master, gently washing and scrubbing their feet one by one and tenderly drying them with the towel around his waist. To love like Jesus, we must be willing to humble ourselves and serve others with a sincere heart.

Second, Jesus’ love is unconditional. Jesus knew all about Judas and his plans to betray him. It was painful to the Lord and Jesus was troubled in his spirit. Yet, the Lord washed Judas’ feet just like everyone else’s and he demonstrated his love for Judas again and again. During the meal, Jesus announced, “**Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.**” The disciples were baffled - none of them knew what Jesus was talking about, but Judas knew. In this way, Jesus gave him a chance to repent and change his mind. When John leaned back and asked Jesus, “**Lord, who is it?**” Jesus answered, “**It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.**” By sharing bread with Judas, Jesus honored him even more. Agape

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

love is a love that loves everyone, even our enemies, to the end. Can we love someone like Judas an unconditional love?

When I first came to UBF, I studied the Bible with Missionary Joshua Hong. One time, I don't know what got into me, but I decided to test his love for me. I said some really offensive things to him and I questioned his sincerity. When he looked at me, he must have thought "Judas is back from the dead!" I really betrayed him in what I said. However, in spite of my attack on him, he continued to serve me and study the Bible with me. In this way, he faithfully demonstrated the unconditional love of Christ.

Third, Jesus loves us in spite of our weaknesses. In verses 31-35, Jesus makes three profound statements. After Judas left, 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.**" Then, in verse 33, Jesus speaks of his departure in very simple terms, saying "**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**" And finally, in light of his departure, Jesus gives his disciples the new command to love one another. But Peter wasn't really listening. The only thing he heard was the part about Jesus leaving. I would have been so frustrated with him! I would have grabbed him by the ears and said, "Why aren't you listening to me?", but Jesus took it in stride. Jesus loves us in spite of our weaknesses and failures. And then, Peter boldly claimed, "**Lord why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.**" It was a foolish thing to say and Jesus had every right to lose his patience with him. But instead, Jesus gently showed Peter that he was really not ready to follow him. Jesus answered Peter, "**Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!**" Jesus was honest with Peter, but he never faltered in his love for him.

Fourth, the love of Christ is a sacrificial love. John 3:16 says, "**For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**" Agape love is a love that will sacrifice anything and everything for the sake of others. Jesus gave his life and the Father surrendered His beloved Son. Love and sacrifice go together. Paul writes in Ephesians 5:1, "**Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved**

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” For us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice means we offer our time, our abilities, our possessions, and our very lives to others.

3. The witness of love and the power to love (vs. 35). In verse 35, Jesus tells us why we are to love one another. Jesus says, **“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”** If we love one another as Jesus commands, then the whole world will know that He is the one we belong to. Our deep, agape love for each other is a testimony to the power of the gospel and the love that God has poured out upon us. The world is thirsty for such love and it looks for it in all kinds of places. But Christ is the only place they can find it and our love for each other points directly to Him.

Jesus taught his disciples, **“You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world.”** In order to be salt and light, we must love each other. Without love, it’s impossible. 1 John 2:9-11 says **“Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble.”** Without love for each other, no one would even know we are Jesus’ disciples. It is love that preserves the world and it is through love that the light of Christ shines.

Love is not optional. Jesus says, **“As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”** In Revelation 2, Jesus praised the church in Ephesus for their good deeds, their hard work, and their perseverance. He commended them for not tolerating wicked people and for enduring many hardships. But still, something was very wrong with that church. Jesus says, **“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.”** Without love, all the things they did were useless and if they continued the way they were going, Jesus promised to remove his spirit from the church. Think about that for a moment. This is the reason churches die. Christ will remove his spirit if he doesn’t find agape love in his church.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

So, where does this leave us and what can we do? By the grace of God, the new standard of love comes with a new power to love. The ability to love one another does not come from within us, but from God Himself. As Peter explains, the power to love comes through our new birth and it comes as we obey the word of God and are sanctified by it. Peter writes, **“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of the imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”** When we were born again, we were born of the Spirit and the very first fruit of the spirit is love. You see, God has given us everything we need to obey Jesus’ command.

Verses 34-35 are the key verses for our Chicago ministry this year. It is because Christ’s command to love one another is fundamental to everything we do. Our prayer topics to be a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation, to evangelize all the major cities and campuses, to have a thriving ministry on Chicago campuses, to have 500 Sunday worshippers and to have 1000 one-to-one Bible studies all depend on our obedience to Christ’s command. Without sincere, agape love, these prayer topics are meaningless. Paul says, **“If speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”** Let us pray for God to fill our hearts with an abundance of agape love that bears witness to the love we have received in Christ.

Today, we have seen the command to love, the standard of love, the witness of love, and the power to love. The only thing left is for us is to obey. Jesus says, **“As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”**