

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 18, 2025

“I give you a new commandment: love one another.”

Did Jesus just say what I think he said? Did I hear him right? Now, I'm not confused about the “love one another” part. I get that. But I'm puzzled by his use of the word “new”. Would his disciples have considered this commandment to be new? I thought that was what all of God's commandments were about. Honor your father and mother; don't kill; don't steal (property or spouses); don't tell lies about others; don't wish you had the stuff that other people have - isn't that love? What's so new about what Jesus was saying?

And Jesus even goes further, telling his disciples that “loving one another” would be the way others would know that they are his disciples. In other words, Jesus seems to be saying that there's this new commandment he's giving them that will become the hallmark of who they are, will become their dominant trait, will be what will make them “different” from everyone else and thereby declare to others that they are his followers.

Wasn't that what everyone was supposed to be doing already?

Well, yes and no. There is no question that the commandments (and the other 600+ Jewish laws) required people to behave in a certain way. Some described what people had to do (or should do). Others described what they were forbidden from doing.

In other words, many of them have a kind of "do" and/or "not to do" quality about them. And they certainly served a worthwhile purpose, keeping people from doing anything unjust or harmful. Yet, many of them delineated a kind of minimal threshold, that is, provided a basic standard for people to obey, but didn't necessarily make the "ideal" the "norm".

And maybe most importantly, many of these laws and commandments didn't really seem to address a person's attitude at all, they didn't describe what was supposed to be going on within a person as they obeyed what was proscribed. And so, one could in a sense, harbor all sorts of bad feelings and attitudes on the inside, yet be fully "faithful" - faithful to what they believed God expected of them. And so some people might have been bitter about

what the law required. Or maybe obeyed the law reluctantly. Or even resented the law. Or secretly wished harm on others. Or were jealous of others. Or whatever. And none of that is true love.

You see, once we start “watering down” what we call love as we see in our world today, we start moving further and further from what it truly is. And if that “watering down” is drastic enough, if it is simply a lukewarm or conditional or anemic version of true love, well, we probably should stop calling it love at all. And the reason is simple.

Every ounce of love we show others does not originate in ourselves. True love, my dear friends, has its origin in God. That’s who God is. And there are no conditions on it. And it is not given only once in a while. And it’s not meted out in tiny parcels. No, God’s love is relentless and unconditional and unceasing. It is a force able to transform every person and every situation. And it’s what we are expected to share - the love that comes to us from our God who has loved us first.

And so, when Jesus tells his disciples to “love one another” he’s inviting them, that’s he’s inviting you and me to love as God loves. He’s asking them not to pick and

choose who they're going to love, but simply do it day-after-day and person after person. And it can not be done begrudgingly. And it can't be because there is something in it for the giver. (That's just another form of selfishness.) And it can't be only toward those we like, or those who agree with us. (That's more like a private club.)

No, Jesus wants us to love in the fullest way possible, love in an extreme kind of way that is visible to all, in a way that shows that our faith actually makes a difference in how we live our lives. Put another way, Jesus wants the love we say we have for God and each other to actually be that love and not something else.

**“This is how all will know that you are my
disciples, . . .”**

It's kind of amazing that, as Jesus neared the end of his earthly life, this is what he wanted to make sure his disciples understood. Remember, this is a man who said lots and lots of things over the course of his life; told countless stories and made all sorts of inspiring speeches and authoritative pronouncements, and yet, he doesn't remind them of any of those things. Love is what's on his

mind. And he wants to make sure it stays on the minds of his followers too. Is it on ours?

I don't mean a diluted love that just looks like being "sort of nice". I don't mean a diluted love that looks like people with much, just sharing a little. I don't mean a diluted love that looks like only forgiving small stuff and not the stuff that really hurts. And I don't mean the kind of diluted love that looks like people just doing good toward people who are good to them.

I mean God-love, the only love that can be called true love. So my dear friends, let's make sure others know us for that, before they know us for anything else.

A Short Story

One day, as usually, an orphan, a little girl, stood at the street corner begging for food, money and what she could get. Now this girl was wearing a very tattered dress, and was dirty. A well-to-do man passed by that corner without giving the girl a second look. But when he returned to his expensive home, to his happy and comfortable family, and his will-laden dinner table, his thoughts returned to the young orphan and he became

very angry with God for allowing such conditions to exist. He reproached God, saying, how can you let such thing to happen. Why don't you do something to help this poor girl? Then he heard God in the depths of his being responding by saying, I did. I created you.