

May Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us and grant us His peace. Amen.

“Love One Another”

I. Jesus brings us God’s love.

II. Jesus enables us to love one another.

Dear Christian friends,

I almost cringe hearing Jesus say, **“By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.”** Church history reports that one of the HALLMARKS of the **very early** Christians was their **“love for one another.”** Supposedly pagans exclaimed about those early Christians, “See HOW THEY LOVE one another!” Would people today say that ABOUT YOU – me – our/your congregation? We aren’t to show Christian love TO BE NOTICED by others but **Christian love will be noticed** because it’s SO DIFFERENT from the world’s kind of love.

Our general Lenten theme this year is “Three Words of Truth.” Are these three words – **“love one another”** – a TRUTH THAT HURTS? It’s painfully clear that we OFTEN DON’T LOVE each other as **Jesus loves** us. **Maybe** you haven’t said it OUT LOUD but have you **ever thought to yourself**, “WHY should I? I don’t feel like it. Leave me alone - I’ve DONE ENOUGH already. Nobody appreciates me – **all I do** is GET CRITICIZED.” How can we square THAT ATTITUDE with, **“A new command I give you: Love one another.”**? Jesus didn’t speak those words to LAY A GUILT TRIP on us but to encourage us to LIVE our Christian faith.

**“Love one another”** - THE TRUTH in **those three words** is that 1)Jesus brings us **God’s love** and 2)Jesus enables us to **love one another**.

I. Jesus came to bring us God’s love.

**“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”** The key to these THREE WORDS of truth are those words, **“As I have loved you.”** Christian love is built on the FACT that **God loves** us. Christian love is OUR RESPONSE to **God’s love** for us.

But the TRUTH BE TOLD **many** people doubt God’s love. Some outright deny it. AS PROOF they point to all the **pains** and problems – the hardships and **calamities** of life – the NATURAL DISASTERS like earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods that kill so many and cause so much damage. “WHY, God?” they ask. “WHERE are You, God?” they wonder. “IF You’re so loving then **how come**...?”

**“As I have loved you.”** We don’t find - and we don’t measure – God’s love by HOW THINGS are going for us. We find God’s love in a CRUDE MANGER. We measure God’s love with a **blood-stained CROSS**. Jesus brings us God’s love. SAVOR these choice passages. **“But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”**

**“As I have loved you.”** God’s love for us is **not** a BLIND love that doesn’t see all our **sins** and **shortcomings**. Many will readily admit they’re NOT PERFECT but at the same time **they’re not** ALL THAT BAD. But there’s no fooling the HOLY, ALL-seeing and **knowing** God. God sees and shows us that we **“are sinful from birth, sinful from the time our mothers conceived us.”** God sees and shows us that **“nothing good lives in us, that is, in our sinful natures.”** God sees and shows us

that BEHIND EVERY sin of **whatever kind** is THE ATTITUDE of rebellion and defiance – “God CAN’T TELL me how to live my life – I’LL DO whatever I want.” God sees and shows us that He HAS EVERY RIGHT to be totally fed up with us – to just give up on us – to damn each one of us to hell’s eternal banishment and punishment.

God sees and shows us **all that** and then He tells us to GO to Bethlehem! **“God SO LOVED the world”** – that what did He do? – **“He gave His only-begotten Son”** to be our perfect Savior. **“AS I have loved you.”** IN LOVE Jesus took the place of all people under God’s law and He lived for us that life of PERFECT LOVE and obedience that we owed God but never could live. AND NOW Jesus was going to show us **“the full extent of His love.”**

**“As I have loved you.”** It was Maundy Thursday evening. **Judas** had JUST LEFT when Jesus spoke these WORDS OF TRUTH. In less than 24 hours Jesus would have brought the PERFECT SACRIFICE to fully pay for **all sins** of **all** people of **all** time – HIMSELF – His precious blood shed on the cross – His innocent life offered as **“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”** Jesus would be **“forsaken”** so that we would be FORGIVEN. Jesus would go through the hell we had coming **so that** we could live forever with Him in **heaven**. THAT’S THE LOVE Jesus brings us love – love that brings us forgiveness full and free – peace with God – a whole new relationship with God – eternal life in heaven the very moment we die.

**“As I have loved you.”** That’s the key to understanding these THREE WORDS OF TRUTH. **“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”** Jesus brings us God’s love and...

## II. He enables us to love one another.

**“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.”** Big changes were SOON TO COME in the apostles’ relationship with Jesus. For the past three years Jesus had been PHYSICALLY and VISIBLY PRESENT with them. They hard heard Him preach and teach – witnessed His miracles – walked and talked and ate with Him. That WOULD ALL CHANGE with **Good Friday** and **Easter** – and especially after Jesus **ascended** into heaven. They would have – WE HAVE! – His promise, **“Lo, I am with you always”** but Jesus is no longer visibly or **physically** with us. But they would still have EACH OTHER. We have **each other**. The love Jesus brings us ENABLES US to **“love one another.”**

Jesus calls this a **“new commandment.”** It’s NOT NEW in the **sense** of never having been heard before. **“Love you neighbor as yourself”** is the SECOND PART of the law. But Jesus gives this a NEW TWIST – a new FRESHNESS and PERSPECTIVE. **“AS I have loved you, so you must love one another.”** Jesus’ love for us is the MOTIVATION and PATTERN for our **“loving one another.”** ONLY CHRISTIANS can really understand this **“new commandment.”** Unbelievers who HAVEN’T PERSONALLY EXPERIENCED Jesus’ love can’t love **“as Jesus has loved us.”** ONLY Christians can show CHRISTIAN LOVE to other people.

Something struck me **as I studied** these verses. We know we ARE TO LOVE **all** people. We are not to limit our love TO ONLY those who love us – those who are nice to us – those who help us etc. We are ALSO TO LOVE our **“enemies”** who can’t stand us – those who would never help us – yes, even those who have hurt or taken advantage of us – those we HAVE NO IDEA **who they are**. That’s all biblically true – GOD’S WILL for our lives.

But Jesus didn’t say **“Love YOUR NEIGHBOR as I have loved you.”** Jesus doesn’t limit our SHOWING **Christian love** TO ONLY those who **are Christians** but Jesus does specifically apply our CHRISTIAN LOVE to our FELLOW Christians. **“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.”** Interesting, isn’t it? What’s Jesus’ POINT?

Love starts WHERE? In the family! We are God's family – ***“brothers and sisters in Christ.”*** Love starts in the family but love in the family can ALSO BE VERY HARD **at times**. NONE of us come from PERFECT families. We didn't marry the **perfect** spouse. We didn't have **perfect** PARENTS – **perfect children** – **perfect brothers** and sisters. **Sometimes** we may have even wished that we were PART OF a DIFFERENT family! And let's not forget – we are AT LEAST AS IMPERFECT (**if not more!**) as our **spouse** – parents – children – siblings.

Being imperfect means there CAN – there WILL – BE PROBLEMS in the family. We aren't always nice to each other. We can say things that weren't **nice** or **true** – we take advantage of someone. There's a WHOLE LONG LIST of possible problems that CAN and DO **show up**. And when that happens OVER and over again it can be really hard to KEEP ON loving – forgiving – being **patient** and **understanding** – supportive and **helpful**. It can be really easy to CARRY GRUDGES, become resentful, etc.

The same can happen in our CHURCH FAMILY. We all have **stubborn, selfish** sinful natures. The devil just loves to EGG US on. He's great at fanning LITTLE PROBLEMS into **burning issues**. Toes get **stepped** on. Feelings get **hurt**. Somebody's not thanked or **appreciated**. Somebody keeps sitting in **my** pew. Somebody didn't say hi to me (SURE I DIDN'T say hi to them but **that's beside** the point, right?!). We know Jesus says ***“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”*** We want to MAKE EXCEPTIONS but Jesus doesn't let us. YOU KNOW what I'm talking about, right? **Perhaps** you've personally seen or experienced it – on **either** the GIVING or RECEIVING side.

Lent is a season of **repentance** but repentance isn't just for Lent. Repentance is the Christian WAY OF LIFE. I mentioned before that I almost CRINGE **hearing** these words. I know the life I've lived. I've been a part of **several** congregations. It isn't always pretty – ALL LOVE and **kisses**.

HONESTY calls for **repentance**. “Lord, forgive us, STARTING with **me!** Lord, change us, STARTING with **me!**” And He does! Jesus KEEPS ON forgiving us – washing us clean with His blood – clothing us with His perfect life – feeding us with His Holy Supper. Oh WHAT A LOVE our Savior has for us! **What a love** Jesus brings us. **Jesus' love** then enables us to TRY IT ALL OVER again. ***“A new command I give you: Love one another. AS I have loved you, so you must love one another.”*** Amen.