

**A reading from St John's Gospel, chapter 13, beginning to read at verse 31**

<sup>31</sup> When *Judas* was gone, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him.

<sup>32</sup> If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

<sup>33</sup> '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.**

<sup>34</sup> 'A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> **By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.'**

**SERMON: 15-5-21**

Jesus gave us a new commandment. He commanded us to love one another. That's a tough commandment. Whenever you get a group of people together, there will be **disagreements**; there will be **frictions**; there will be **personality clashes**; there will be **problems**. Unfortunately, that's true even in churches.

- Some people want to do it this way, and others want to do it that way.
- Some people want to spend money, and others want to save it.
- Some people want to place the emphasis here, and others want to place it there.

- Some people are very, very sensitive and have to be handled with kid gloves.
- Some people just drive other people crazy.

**How can Jesus COMMAND us to love one another?**

- Jesus might **SUGGEST** that we love one another.
- Better yet, he might suggest that we **TRY** to love one another.
- Even better, he might suggest that we **HAVE A GOAL** to love one another.
- But is it realistic for Jesus to **COMMAND** us to love?

I'm reminded of a *Peanuts* cartoon. Lucy says to Charlie Brown: "You know what I don't understand? I don't understand love!"

Charlie says, "Who does?"

Lucy says, "Explain love to me, Charlie Brown."

So Charlie says, "Well, let's say I see this beautiful, cute little girl walk by."

Lucy interrupts — "Why does she have to be cute? Huh? Why can't someone fall in love with someone with freckles and a big nose? Explain that!"

Charlie says, "Well, maybe you are right. Let's just say I see this girl walk by with this great big nose.... "

Lucy shouts, "I didn't say GREAT BIG NOSE."

And Charlie, admitting defeat, says, "Not only can you not explain love — you can't even talk about it."

That is true of most of us, isn't it! On paper, we're great!

But in real life, we have bad breath.  
In real life, we say the wrong thing.  
In real life, we blow up over nothing at all.

Then Jesus comes into this messy picture, saying,  
**"A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another"** (v. 34). Not easy!

Perhaps it depends on what Jesus means by love.  
What does Jesus mean when he tells us to love one another? After all, the word **"love"** is used in many ways. It has many different meanings.

Last Sunday Americans celebrated Mother's Day.  
Mothers know more about love than anyone.  
A mother's love is special! Most of us remember our mother's love as a great blessing. Mothers love tenderly.  
A child with a scraped knee or broken heart usually goes to mum for comfort. You can't count on dads. Sometimes dads say, "Get tough!"  
Mums are more dependable when we need sympathy.

Mothers tend to be gentler than dads, but they can love ferociously too.--Don't ever stand between a mother bear and her cub.

The mother who thinks that you're a threat to her children can turn deadly in a heartbeat.  
Mothers love tenderly, and they love ferociously.

But there are other kinds of love. We speak of a young man and a young woman as being **"in love"**.

"What does that mean?"

Sometimes it means a deep, passionate relationship that has the potential to undergird a lifelong marriage – "in sickness and in health, in adversity and in prosperity, until death us do part."

But sometimes the word love means very little.  
Sometimes love just means **his** excitement over the curve of her waist or **her** excitement over his muscular build.

People talk of **"making love."** What does **that** mean? Sometimes, it means nothing more than a moment of passion – no real affection – no concern for the other person.

But Jesus doesn't let the word "love" melt into soggy mush. He **commands** us to love, and then he **tells us** what that means. Jesus says:

**"A new commandment I give unto you,  
that you love one another!  
Just as I have loved you;  
that you also love one another"**(v. 34).

Jesus calls us to love as he loved us.

How did Jesus love us?

Let's take this passage from Paul's letter to the Philippians. It does not use the word "love," but it clearly describes Christ's love. Paul says that even though Christ existed from the beginning in the form of God:

"He didn't consider equality with God a thing to be grasped,  
but EMPTIED himself, taking the form of a servant,  
being made in the likeness of men.  
And being found in human form, He HUMBLIED himself,  
becoming OBEDIENT TO DEATH,  
yes, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:5-8)

So loving as Christ loved means EMPTYING ourselves of our pride – our selfishness.

It means HUMBLING ourselves.

It means becoming OBEDIENT to God's will even when that means sacrificing something that we want.

John speaks of God's love this way:

**"For God so loved the world,  
that he GAVE his one and only Son,  
that whoever believes in him SHOULD NOT PERISH,  
but have eternal life" (John 3:16).**

So, when Jesus tells us to love one another:

He is telling us to make sacrifices in behalf of each other.

He is telling us to take care of each other, even at great cost.

He is telling us to think less of ourselves and more of the other person.

He is telling us to **act** loving, even if we don't **feel** loving.

We think of love as a **feeling**. Can Jesus command us to **FEEL** love? Can we control our feelings?

Love, for Jesus, involved ACTION more than feeling. We might not be able to FEEL warm and fuzzy feelings for other people, but we can ACT in kind and loving ways toward them.

Jesus' commandment to love enemies is found in three places.

In each instance, Jesus tells us to love our enemies, and then he tells us the action required.

In the first instance Jesus says:

**"LOVE your enemies,  
BLESS those who curse you,  
DO GOOD to those who hate you,  
and PRAY for those who mistreat you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).**

Let's listen to the action verbs in that verse.

**Bless – do good – pray.**

We might not feel warmth for the other person, but we can bless them – do good to them—and pray for them.

In the second instance Jesus says,

**"Love your enemies, DO GOOD to those who hate you" (Luke 6:27).**

There's that action verb again.

**"DO GOOD to those who hate you."**

In the third instance Jesus says, **"Love your enemies, and DO GOOD, and LEND, expecting nothing back"**(Luke 6:35).

There's that **DO GOOD** action verb again. In that verse Jesus adds a new action verb – **LEND**.

**"Lending, and expecting nothing back."**

Jesus makes it clear that, regardless of our feelings, we can act in loving ways toward each other –and that fulfils the requirement.

The interesting thing is that, when we act in loving ways, our feelings of love grow too.

**Our acts of love make a difference.**

Frederick Buechner, a Christian author, tells of walking down a New York City street.

He walked past a middle-aged black woman. As they passed, she smiled at Buechner and said, "**Jesus loves you!**"

I used to live in London, and I can tell you that Londoners do not usually smile at strangers and say, "**Jesus loves you!**" Mostly they ignore you. They have learned that they can have privacy, even in the middle of a crowd, if they just ignore everyone.

They're happy to have everyone ignoring them.

But this woman smiled at Buechner and said, "**Jesus loves you!**" in the same tone that most of say, "Good morning!" She caught Buechner off-guard. and when he realized what she had said, he wanted to respond.

He wanted to thank her. He wanted to say, "Hey! Jesus loves you too!"

But by the time he recovered, she was gone.

But that wasn't the end of the story.

Buechner says:

**"For the rest of the way I was going,  
the streets I walked on were paved with gold.**

**Nothing was different.**

**Everything was different**

**The city was transfigured.**

**I was transfigured.**

**It was a new New York....**

**For a moment it was not the world AS IT IS that I saw,  
but the world AS IT MIGHT BE"**

When that woman spoke to Buechner, she changed his world. She did something else, too.

She identified herself as a Christian – and in a lovely way! When she smiled and said, "Jesus loves you," Buechner knew that she was a kindred spirit – a fellow believer – a sister in Christ.

On that New York street, so full of people but so devoid of the human touch,

Buechner was meeting someone, however briefly, with whom he shared something important – something spiritual.

Perhaps, when we do something good for someone we don't like– that helps us as much as it does them.

Perhaps, when we pray for an enemy, we will feel the acid of our anger fading – and our understanding of our enemy growing.

Jesus said, "**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another**" (v. 34). Then he said, "**By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another**" (v. 35).

That happened when this woman said, "**Jesus loves you.**"

**One of the things that should draw people to this church is our love for each other.**

**We do have differences, and we do irritate each other.**

**But we also love each other. And when we love each other, we show people that we are Christ's disciples.**

**People will see Christ in us and learn to love him too.**

John Lyly, a 16th century English writer, said that—

**"Love Knoweth No Law."**

That's an interesting comment. Jesus gave us a law to love, and John Lyly said that "**love knoweth no law.**"

Was Lyly suggesting that Jesus was wrong?

**Surely not.** I think that Lyly was suggesting that, when we obey Jesus' commandment to love, we no longer require laws to guide us.

- Once we love each other, we don't need a law which tells us to **walk a mile** with the other person.
- Once we love each other, we will walk with each other **mile after mile** after mile for the pleasure of it.

Love charts our direction, and love gives us energy.

For the sake of our Lord, Jesus Christ, let us obey Him.

Let us obey the law of love – let us love one another

Let us allow our love bear witness to our faith in Christ.

**Amen**