

**Introduction:**

A. Full disclosure. I preached this sermon exactly one year ago.

Reminds me of a pastor I heard about who preached the same sermon three Sundays in a row till someone asked him why.

“Well,” he said, “when you all do this then I’ll move on.”

The church father, **Jerome**, around 400AD, told a story that had been handed down to him, about John the apostle.

*The blessed John the Evangelist lived in Ephesus until extreme old age. His disciples could barely carry him to church and he could not muster the voice to speak many words. During individual gatherings he usually said nothing but, "Little children, love one another." The disciples and brothers in attendance, annoyed because they always heard the same words, finally said, "Teacher, why do you always say this?" He replied with a line worthy of John: "Because it is the Lord's commandment and if it alone is kept, it is sufficient."*

B. I’ve returned to this command one more time because, to put it simply, while I believe this is a very loving church, none of us has mastered this. Furthermore, your love for one another will be especially crucial in the days ahead. And as I said to you last year, **when people come within the orbit of Village Church the Lord wants them to realize, “These people really love one another and they loved me.”**

C. Turn to **John 13:34-35**. Jesus’ command, “love one another,” appears twelve times in the New Testament, and is implicit many other places. In these two verses Jesus repeats that command three times. “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 statements each with a message:

V.33: “*A new command I give you: Love one another.*”

I. “**LOVE ONE ANOTHER**” IS JESUS’ **NEW** COMMAND

A good question would be, “**What’s new about it?**” In the new Christian community only love for Christ and one another will bind us together.

A. One thing that would make it *new* was the *one another* part.

Jesus foresaw a much different community than the disciples could imagine, and one far different than what the people in OT times envisioned. The Jews of Jesus’ day were described by a Roman historian as “*haters of the human race,*” because of their narrowness and separation.<sup>1</sup> Jesus’ command here lay the groundwork for the day when his followers would become a community like no one in the world had ever seen before. Remember how I’ve told you that in Jesus’ day no one, Jewish, Roman, or Greek, would have ever regarded someone outside their immediate family as brother or sister? Yet within a few years Paul would write to the Gentile Galatians, “*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*” That was new!

B. Here’s another thing that is new: the old command was to love your neighbor as yourself. Our love for ourselves was our moral standard for loving other. But now, instead of “love your neighbor as yourself,” we are able to love as the Father and Son love one another. At the very end of Jesus’ prayer in **John 17** he asked his Father that, “*...the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.*” Before Christ, people could love one another only at a certain human level—“*as yourself.*” But Christians can love one another with the very love of God himself, because we live in that love through the Holy Spirit. **That’s what’s new about it.**

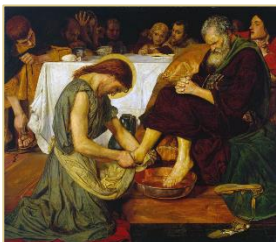
- C. One more thing: since we can love as Christ loves, our love for one another comes with divine effect—Christlike, healing, wise, servant-hearted, sacrificial. **1 John 4:16-17** says, “*God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. ... In this world we are like Jesus.*” This is like a superpower! Your kindness, your mercy, your blessing can touch someone as though Jesus himself touched them. **That’s what’s new!**
- D. But here’s the thing: we have to step into difficult relationships and messy situations believing that God will make his love come through us. Imagine you’re facing a really difficult person, or imagine you know you should reach out to someone in need but you just don’t feel like it. You can’t just look to Jesus and say, “*OK, power me up!*” Jesus will say, “*You go first. You step into loving, even tho’ it’s difficult, or you don’t feel like it. You go first, and when you do, I will fill your little love with my love.*” We cannot wait till we *feel* loving. Do the loving thing, do the merciful thing, the self-sacrificing thing, and people will see Jesus.

V.34 again: “*As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*”

## II. NOW WE MUST LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS CHRIST HAS LOVED US

- A. In your Bible, notice how this chapter begins. It is the story of Jesus washing his disciples’ feet at the Last Supper.

That’s the context for Jesus’ commands here. *Illus.*: I hope



you’ve stopped to look at the print of this painting by Ford Madox Brown hanging in the foyer. Look closer for a moment. Look at Peter’s concentration. Look at the astonishment of these disciples in the background. Is the one on the left Judas?

Do you see the bag of coins on the table? Look at this one,

already unlacing his sandals. There's John, looking in wonder over Peter's shoulder. And finally, Jesus, intent on his service.

In this act of service, the Son of God, the King of Israel, became a servant to his followers. John writes in **vv.12-16**:

*When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. **I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.** Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."*

- B. When Jesus washed his disciples' feet he was providing a kind of explanation for his greater service to come the next day when he died on the cross. When Jesus died he was serving us by saving us. Jesus said, "*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*" The first way we take up Jesus' cross when we serve one another sacrificially. **As Christians, we are dying to love one another!**

To love one another as Christ loved us always requires humility and it is always an act of self-sacrifice—of regarding someone else more highly than you do yourself. **Col. 3:12-14** says, "*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And*

*over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*” I call these things **“love’s coat of many colors.”** Every act and attitude listed there costs us something; it all takes some dying, it all has the feel of Christ’s cross. My beloved book mentor, **Alexander Maclaren**, said, *“Love’s language is sacrifice. ‘I give You [Jesus] myself,’ is its motto.”*

- C. Here’s a wonderful bonus: When we love one another as Christ loves us we become like Christ. It isn’t our service of *them* that you’ll remember. It is the way Jesus touched *you*. Illus.: A friend sent me this picture from 10 years ago. There’s a story here I’m not proud of. That Sunday I was going to preach on this foot washing story. After the sermon, with that same painting on the screens, and someone singing Michael Card’s song, “The Basin and the Towel,” the plan was to have someone wash another person’s feet. Ed was one of our elders and he agreed to be the washee. But you know, I could *not* find *anyone* who was going to be there that morning to do the washing. I bet I called eight or ten people. Now, I didn’t want to do it because, as I told people then, I am the focus of too much attention around here as it is. It’s good to let others do things.

But there was another reason. Ed had gotten under my skin. I don’t like being criticized, no matter how nicely it is done. So you can put the pieces together. Honestly, I had been nursing a grudge. So, even with all these people in church, no one was available to wash Ed’s feet except me. When Jesus washed Peter’s feet it was Peter who was deeply humbled. But in our case, it was me. I couldn’t wash Ed’s feet, of course, while still nursing my grudge. It’s not possible. I had to let it go before I could serve him. It was

an ugly thing that God and I had to deal with but we did it. You can't tell this in the picture, but it was very hard to take on the posture of Jesus there. But in the end, Jesus served me more than I served Ed. And I became a little more like Jesus.

There is one more statement here in **v.35**,  
“*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*”

### **III. OUR LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER AUTHENTICATES THE GOSPEL TO THOSE AROUND US**



- A. On the face of it, this seems like a pretty underwhelming outreach strategy. Of all the things we might do to draw attention to our faith in Jesus Christ, nothing—nothing—will be so foundational as loving one another in the new way Jesus has brought to life for us and in us. He doesn't even say it will be how we love the unbelievers, but how we love *one another*! We can surely do Christlike things for unbelievers but **it is our mutual love for one another—our loving *interaction and community* as the people of God—that will display Jesus most effectively.**
- B. I think this is so powerful because people around us are starved for the kind of relationships that only Christians can enjoy. A few months ago I read this:

***America is suffering an epidemic of loneliness.***

*According to a recent large-scale survey from the health care provide, Cigna, most Americans suffer from **strong feelings of loneliness and a lack of significance** in their relationships. **Nearly half say they sometimes or always feel alone or “left out.”** **Thirteen percent of Americans say that zero people know them well.**<sup>ii</sup>*

So imagine the impact it would have on such people if they could see genuine Christian love up close and personal.

Maybe we invite them to church where the love they see and hear in the foyer is more persuasive than our songs or sermons. Maybe we tell them about the grace we've experienced from a fellow believer, or the joy Jesus gives us when we serve others in the Body. Perhaps we could invite them to our Growth Group.

- C. When we learn to love *one another* from our cross of humility and self-sacrifice we become better able to love anyone else—including the unbelievers around us. We don't learn to love well out in the world. We learn that here with these people. Here's where your witness gets its heart.
- D. **Christian love, this *new* kind of love that only Christ can give us, can be so authentic, so humble and kind, so sacrificial, so wise, that people will look for an explanation.** And when they look for an explanation they will see Jesus. Look at what happened in the early days of the church, in **Acts 2:44-47**:

*All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

## Conclusion

So what is expected of us? "*Love one another.*" **It isn't okay to be isolated, disconnected; to keep your distance. These are our brothers and sisters and we must love them, we *can* love**

**them, we have the *privilege* of loving them. The Lord Jesus has not given us a choice. And when we do this, we will be like Jesus in the world.**

We must be involved with each other. It's pretty hard to love people whose names you don't know and whose lives are a mystery to you. Get involved in a Growth Group. Serve with other believers here at church or elsewhere. When we send you word of prayer requests, *pray* for each other. And as God positions you to help, step into the messes in our brothers' and sisters' lives. If there are no relationships outside our immediate family that cost us something, we're not really loving one another as Jesus loved us.

I would especially urge you in the days ahead to actively love your leaders here. *Love* Pastor Kenny and Pastor Casey. Think of how heavy the load is that they will be carrying! Think of how hard it is for these young pastors to step into my old, well-worn shoes. *Love* your elders. Pray for them all. Help them. Please, please don't criticize or compare. Listen: you can make or break these leaders, especially these young pastors. So love them as Jesus has loved you.

*Illus.:* The Apostle John, who recorded these words, and who wrote the three epistles that bear his name, and who described himself five times as "*the disciple whom Jesus loved*" couldn't say it often enough. "*Little children, love one another.*"

*"Teacher, why do you always say this?"*

*"Because it is the Lord's commandment and if it alone is kept, it is sufficient."*

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<sup>i</sup> Alexander Maclaren, *Last Sheaves*, p.58

<sup>ii</sup> Arthur C Brooks, "How Loneliness Is Tearing America Apart, *New York Times*, 11/23/18