

Love Commandment

“To love one another just as the way I have loved you (13:34).” We are all familiar with this new commandment, this new commandment is simple enough for a child to understand, but challenging enough that none of us could say “I have fully obeyed and followed this commandment.” This new commandment was given at the same night when Jesus and the disciples had their last meal.

There were actually several very important things that took place during that night. Here is what happened: Jesus and his disciples had the last meal, during which Jesus broke the bread as his body given for us and after the meal, he took the cup as his blood for the forgiveness of sins. Also during that meal, Jesus kneeled down, washed all of his disciples’ feet. At the same night, Judas left the table and betrayed Jesus. Right after Judas left, Jesus gave this new commandment to his disciples saying, “you’re to love one another the way I have loved you.” Then he predicted Peter’s denial right after he gave out this new commandment.

Jesus was asking his disciples to love one another just as he had done to them. He loved Judas, he loved Peter, so he asked other disciples to love them just as Jesus did. On top of that Jesus gave them several other teachings. When he finished all his words, he went to the garden, prayed one last time to the Father with tears, sorrow, and pain before he was arrested, mistreated, and crucified the next day.

While I was preparing the sermon and reading through the whole story of what had happened all at one night. I was truly surprised how much information for disciples to take within one night! If we only look at the part from verse 31 to verse 35, without putting it into what all happened in that one night, I think the love we are talking about here is not the real love anymore.

When Jesus kneeled down and washed his disciples’ feet, he knew exactly who he was serving. He was serving Judas, the one who would later betray him

with a kiss; he was serving Simon Peter, who would deny him; and he was serving all other disciples who would later on hide in one room with fear and uncertainty after he was crucified. Jesus knew exactly how difficult real love can be, and he **showed us the faithful love through serving the ones who would not be faithful to him.**

When Jesus took the bread and broke it, he said: "This is my body given for you." And after supper he took the cup, saying: "this cup is the new covenant in my blood for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me." Jesus knew exactly how difficult real love can be, yet he **showed us the sacrificial love through the cross.**

When Jesus was being hung on the cross, he cried out: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." Jesus knew exactly how difficult real love can be, and he **showed us his unconditional love through loving those who have killed him and laughed at him.**

In today's first reading, from Acts 11 it says, "Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God." They questioned Peter, "why did you go to eat with them?" **In other words, they were saying, "They are Gentiles, you should not eat with them. They are not worthy to listen to God's words and the salvation is only for us and not them."** Jesus knew exactly how difficult real love can be, so he **showed Peter and to all who have limited his love, that the real love has no barrier.**

In the past week, I have been thinking a lot about different faith traditions. How could we love one another even though we have many differences?

As some of you know that Claire and I lead the Lutheran Class together. In the past few weeks, we invited people from different faith backgrounds come and to share their faith traditions. One week the class went to a mosque to join a Ramadan evening prayer service. After the service there was a big free communion meal and we sat in different table so that we can learn from our Muslim neighbors. Claire shared with us a very interesting conversation with the

person sitting next to her. Here is what Claire said, “He first asked who I believe Jesus was, and then asked if he was God or Human. When I responded both, he asked whether Jesus had created the world, However, when I said God did, he said ‘but I thought Jesus was God?’ and “how many gods are there?” Those are all hard questions to explain. Nevertheless, I really enjoyed the whole idea of sharing meal with each other. Although we hold very different faith, especially many wars have fought between these two faith traditions. It is hard to love someone who are so different from us. But at that place, we can sit together and listen to each other’s stories, of course with some hard questions.

On the past Friday night, the Confirmation class visited a Jewish synagogue and joined their service. It is interesting to watch both the differences and similarities of the worship language from us.

Love is hard, very much hard. Especially when we are facing those who are different from us, who hold different political views, who disagree with us, who have come from a very different faith traditions or cultures. But one thing we can always hold is that **Jesus loves us even if we fail to love others.**

Let us pray: dear God, we give thanks for the new commandment you gave to us. Help us to learn how to love one another, teach us to be open for those who are different from us. Send us your Spirit and strengthen us when we are tired, when we even don’t know how to love. Remind us that your love is always with us no matter who we are and how many times we have fail to love one another. In Jesus name we pray. Amen!