

John 15:9—17

Title: Jesus' commandment: Love one another

Our Gospel lesson records one of the greatest commandments which Jesus has given all his disciples: Love one another He gave this commandment to his disciples on the night he was betrayed, and handed over to be crucified. We call that day, Maundy Thursday. Love one another. Love is so important to God that scripture says "God is love." Jesus says the whole basis of the Ten commandments is "love;" love God, love your neighbor. John 13:35 tells us that the world will know we are Christians by our love. They will know we are Christians by our love..." not only our love for God but our love for each other.... and not only love for the nice people, but our love for the loud irritating person the poor person the immature, the weak and sick the negative person etc. This love was to be the symbol of our membership in God's kingdom. Secondly, at the Last Supper, Jesus adds two more symbols. He took a loaf and broke it and gave it to his disciples saying: Take eat, this is my body which is broken for you, do this in remembrance of me. Then he took a cup with wine. He drank from it and gave it to his disciples saying, "Drink ye all of this, for this is my blood which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sin." It is this which we celebrate in our Communion service. In fact, the commandments "to eat & drink the body of Christ, and "to love one another" are entwined with each other.

Take the commandment "love one another" first. While the commandment is simple, carrying out the commandment is not. Sometimes loving one another is easy, sometimes not. Some people are easy to love, others are not. When we are feeling good, when things are going well, it is easy "to love one another." But when we are confronted with situations where our feelings get hurt or we think there is unfairness, or someone is not following the rules, it is hard to love one another. Rather, when these things happen, the natural sinful human response is: I want to attack... I want to fight, I want justice, I want my rights. But when I fight many times the end results really don't make me happy. Relationships are broken... Feelings hurt. The satisfaction of revenge... doesn't satisfy. Even if I win the battle, I end up unhappy. Even if I win the battle I end up not really getting what I really wanted in the first place. This is the problem with trying to fix problems by force. There is an intrinsic failure, a weakness, in using force. A conflict which engages force, a conflict where each side seeks to "win" can never bring happiness. Why? Because no matter how the conflict ends, is that one person always loses out, one side always loses.

Conflict will be with us so long as there is sin in the world. We cannot control that. But what we can control is how we respond to conflict. God calls us to a better way. Let's say you have a conflict. But instead of seeking to win suppose we carried out Christ's command "to love one another." How am I different? Because I love the other person, I don't want to destroy him. Rather, because I love that person, I want to seek a "win-win" solution. What if the goal was reconciliation rather than winning? What if we could work together, to seek a solution which benefits both. What if we could attack problems together, as friends rather than as adversaries? This would be the epitome of "loving one another" This would be what it means to be obedient to Christ's command.

However, even though it sounds easy, it is not. It's not easy to drop all the bad feelings, the hurt feelings, the feelings of being taken advantage of and just 'love one another.' Many times, it's hard to find the "win-win" scenario in confrontations. And there is a reason why it is hard. The reason that it is hard is that this world tells us, this sinful shortsighted world tells us that we are governed by "the law of limited good". The "law of limited good" states that there is only a finite amount of resources and time in this world. The world says one person's gain is another's loss. So, according to this sinful world any conflict must end with one side "losing". And if the world is correct, then it is impossible "to love one another." It will be impossible because not everyone will see win-win, not everyone will even desire win-win. And we will be left with a very sad world.

Yet, this is not how God wanted things to be. This is not how God created us to be. God wants to return us to the way we were when he created us. At creation, everything was a gift from God. There was no need to fight for anything because everything was supplied by God. All of Man's needs were met. But then as you know, Adam and Eve disobeyed God and sin entered the world. Because of sin, all of mankind became blind to God, blind to the gifts that he constantly gives us. This is the origin of the false law of limited Good. Because the world is blind to the gifts of God, it only sees the finite resources of this world. And as a result, the people of this world are afraid of loss. They feel that they must fight for their share. They need to defend themselves.

Not only that but there is something even deeper, more insidious. You see many desires, many of our needs, can only be satisfied by God. But because the world is blind to God they are blind to the only thing which satisfies. As a result, they can never get the true fulfillment of their needs. For this reason, all the harder do they cling to the little they have. "The law of limited good" causes self-centered-ness: "Got to take care of me and my own". And this is the insidious thing which this sinful world brings. By its very sinful nature it sabotages Man's ability to "Love one another." You see, it's hard to work things out with a win-win attitude when you are being self-centered. If I think that the good of one person is always my loss. it will be hard to work things out as a team.

Yet, the good news is that God did not desire for us to remain in such a sinful state. God has brought us a way to break the stalemate. He sent his Son Jesus. When Jesus died on the cross, he healed the break between God and us. Our relationship with God was healed. Because he died on the cross and rose to heaven, the Holy Spirit has come down to us, and we see things from God's point of view, we see this world through the eyes of faith. We are no longer blind to God. We are eternal beings Eternal life is more than just life unending. It is a quality of life.

Of living with all desires satisfied.

Of being all that we were created to be.

Of knowing that no matter what we suffer here on Earth that God will one day make all things right again.

Of the peace of knowing that we are loved and cared for.

This IS the abundance we live in. We live in abundance.

This Godly view of the world... this eternal view of the world... is lived out when we participate in the Lord's supper. It is here that we live out the command to "love one another" in the act of receiving the body and blood of Jesus at the Lord's table. As we receive Christ's body and blood, we are confessing that we are re-experiencing the one "forgiveness of sins" won for us at the cross 2000 years ago. In receiving the forgiveness of sins offered through the body and blood of Jesus Christ we are confessing that our relationship with God has been healed. We are confessing that life eternal in all its richness is ours.

And consequently, here is the miracle of love. When we receive Christ's body and blood in communion as we recognize Christ's body in us, we simultaneously recognize Christ's body in all those around us. We, who come here to worship together are the body of Christ. In confessing that our relationship WITH God has been healed, we are also confessing that our relationships within the body of Christ have been healed. We are also confessing that our relationships with each other have been healed. And this is more than just SAYING "we have peace with one another." It is an act of will. Love is an act of will, not of feeling. When we say that we are "reconciled," God calls us to live it out. You are to live as if your relationships with each other are reconciled, no matter your feelings, no matter the unfairness. You are to live out your reconciled life in action. That is how we obey Christ's command to love one another. Because we realize that Christ is reconciled with us, we reconcile ourselves with others. We love one another as Christ first loved us. To come to communion and receive forgiveness is also a commitment to live out our healed relationships, to love one another as Christ first loved us.

If the person who has sinned against you has come before the Lord's table... if they have eaten the bread and drunk the wine; they have received their Savior truly. And as you look at one another know that Jesus is looking back at you. You want to know what Jesus looks like? We are the body of Christ. Look at one another. You want to know what Jesus looks like? Look in the mirror. When you look at your brother or sister at the Lord's table, who has wronged you. It is Jesus, in them, who is asking you to forgive them. It is Jesus, in you, who will forgive them. When you look at your brother or sister at the Lord's table whom you have wronged. It is Jesus, in you who is asking them for forgiveness. It is Jesus, in them, who forgives you.

It is the Lord in us who will empower us to love one another as he first loved us. We do not look at ourselves, and our own needs, that's what the world would have us do. Rather we look to God. The world would have us scramble to protect our own. The world would have us protect what little we have. The world would have us scramble for what little we can get. But because of Christ, we do not need to do that. Because of Christ we live in abundance. We do not need to scramble. Because of Christ we have already received so much. We do not fear the law of limited good for God is the source of infinite good. As we remember this, our gratefulness, prompts us to respond to God with love.

And here is the deeper solution to conflict. It will be precisely because we are the body of Christ that we will be able to tackle problems from a “win-win” point of view. It will be because we are the body of Christ that we will be able to attack problems as a team, rather than as adversaries. There will be no need to fight. We follow God’s command to love one another. And the power to do this will come from God. Through this power we will be able to face any conflict, any challenge of this world, TOGETHER as the body of Christ.

"A new command I give you: Love one another." Amen