**Love one another**

Text: John 13:34-35

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures:** Leviticus 19:9-18; John 13:31-35; John 15:12-17

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 434, 133b, 503, 390, 525

**Series:** The ‘One Anothers’ of Scripture (#1)

**Theme:** Jesus commands his disciples to love one another – doing so shows the world that they are indeed his disciples if they obey Him in this.

**Proposition:** Love one another as Christ has loved you

**Introduction**

If I said to you that this is a ‘new sermon’, then you would understand that I have written it for this occasion, and it has not been preached before. That is correct. If I said to you that I am wearing a new pair of shoes, then I doubt very much that you would think that I had just manufactured them myself and put them on for the first time this afternoon (for the record, I am not wearing a new pair of shoes today!). The word ‘new’ can mean ‘produced for the first time, not existing before’ or ‘new’ can mean ‘already existing, but seen or experienced now for the first time’.

It is this second sense of the word ‘new’ that Jesus uses when He says to his disciples who were gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem on the last occasion that He would be with them before His death. Jesus said: “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (*John 13:34-35*).*

There are two commands to love in the Old Testament Mosaic Law. Can you remember them? “*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might*” (Deut 6:5). And: “*You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD*” (Lev 19:18). Jesus revealed that the whole law and the prophets are summed up in these two ‘love’ commands (Mark 12:28-33).

In John’s first letter he confirms that the command to love one another is ‘*no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning*’ (1 John 2:7). What then is ‘new’ about this commandment, which was already existing, but was now seen in Jesus for the first time?

It is now linked to a new standard ‘*just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another*’ (v34). If we are going to understand how to love one another, then we must understand how Christ has loved us. The command to love one another occurs three times in our text of two verses from John’s gospel and twice in our other reading from John 15:12-17. We also find this command five times in John’s first letter (3:11; 3:23; 4:7; 4:11; 4:12) and once in his second letter (5) as well as in the letter to the Romans (13:8) and to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 4:9).

This is the first in a series of sermons focusing on the ‘one anothers’ of Scripture. Today as we look at the new command in Christ to love one another, we’ll do so under three headings:

1. Love by denying yourself
2. Love affectionately
3. Love obediently
4. **Love by denying yourself**

The English language is rich in vocabulary and often there are many alternative words we can use to describe something - often with only small variations between the different meanings. Yet we really only have one word for love. That is: love! However, as you may well know there are different Greek words which are translated in our Bibles to the single English word ‘love’. The love Jesus commands is not a romantic or sexual love (eros), nor is it the brotherly love of close friends (philia). This love (agape) is an act of the will in faithful commitment to another. This love ‘bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things’ (1 Cor 13:7).

This ‘agape love’ is displayed in costly action. Jesus explains “*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends*” (John 15:13). Agape love gives extravagantly, as God the Father has done. "*For God so loved the world, that he* ***gave*** *his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16). “*God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rom 5:8).

God does not merely love with this faithful giving, self-sacrificial love, He is love Himself (1 John 4:8). This gives us a big clue about the love which is embodied in the ‘new’ commandment to love one another. It is **not** a love which comes naturally to us. It cannot come from our human nature as both romantic and close friendship love do. This love is different, it is ‘other worldly’ – it is heavenly love. It is the very highest form of love that Christ calls us to have for ‘one another’.

Self-sacrifice by definition is personally costly. I remember visiting a fellow pastor in Australia a few years ago. We had arranged to meet at his church building and to have lunch together. I thought that we’d go out to a café for a bite, but he had planned to remain in the building and had brought his packed lunch with him. He offered me half of his lunch, thereby denying himself the other half. Denying yourself what you can rightfully claim is at the heart of this sacrificial love. Think about Jesus ‘*who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men*’ (Phil 2:6-7).

My fellow pastor in Australia denied himself half his lunch (for which I was thankful), how infinitely much more has Christ denied Himself in the actions which demonstrate His agape love for us? Not only did He deny Himself all the privileges of divinity on this earth. Not only did He live here as a servant, denying himself the elevated status which He deserved as a perfect teacher and leader, He also denied Himself comfort, peace and ultimately life as He died at Calvary.

Remember that Jesus told his disciples, "*If anyone would come after me, let him* ***deny*** *himself and take up his cross and follow me*” (Matt 16:24). It is clear that loving one another as Jesus commands means ‘loving others by denying yourself’. When Jesus says, “*love one another: just as I have loved you’* He is not calling us to atone for one another’s sins – we cannot do this. There is only One Saviour, Jesus Christ, who by denying Himself has given his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). So in what ways are we called to deny ourselves in order to love one another? This is a very good question for us all to ponder in the light of Scripture.

One answer is by actively pursuing the ‘one anothers’ of Scripture, for example:

1. “Bear one another's burdens’ (Gal 6:2).
2. “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph 4:32).
3. ‘Bear with one another in love’ (Eph 4:2).
4. ‘Let us not pass judgment on one another’ (Rom 14:13).
5. ‘Through love serve one another’ (Gal 5:13).
6. Submit ‘to one another out of reverence for Christ’ (Eph 5:21).
7. ‘Stir up one another to love and good works’ (Heb 10:24).
8. ‘Show hospitality to one another without grumbling’ (1 Pet 4:9).

I plan for us to look at these commands in more detail in the coming weeks. Can you see how they all flow out from the call to love one another as Christ has loved us? The self-denial which is necessary to love others as Christ has loved us is only possible if we are motivated by our love for Him. It is only possible for those who have come to Jesus in repentance and faith. It is only possible for those whose hearts have been transformed by His grace. Have you come to Jesus? Brothers and sisters, “*We love because he first loved us*” (1 John 4:19). You might ask, **who** are we to love? This brings us to our second point:

1. **Love all kinds of people**

Some people are easier to love than others. Some people are difficult to love. Is the love which Christ calls us to have for one another just to be restricted to a few people that we don’t disagree with about anything, have similar backgrounds and interests to, and who we like? Surely if we could limit the scope of those who love then Christ’s command to ‘love one another’ would be more ‘doable’? Just how broadly are we to love?

In the upper room Jesus is just speaking to his twelve disciples. Clearly the command to love one another applies to fellow disciples of Jesus – our brothers and sisters in Christ. This is also evident in the first letter of John where he repeatedly calls fellow disciples to ‘*love one another*’ (1 John 3:11,23; 4:7,11,12). In fact, this is one of the ways in which those who believe in the name of the Son of God may know that they have eternal life (1 John 5:13). Loving fellow disciples is evidence of saving faith. Loving fellow Christians is a source of personal assurance of faith. So, if we love fellow believers, not just those in our own local congregation, but also those we know from other churches, is that the extent of the command to ‘love one another’? Are there others that we are called to love also?

Do you remember the lawyer who sought to put Jesus to test about his understanding of God’s law? When Jesus repeated the words of Leviticus 19:18 “*you shall love your neighbour as yourself*”, gospel writer Luke records that the lawyer, desiring to justify himself said to Jesus “*And who is my neighbour?*’ (Luke 10:29). This man was seeking to limit the range of kinds of people who God called him to love.

It was then that Jesus told the parable of the ‘good Samaritan’ a man from a people group despised by the Jews. This Samaritan showed agape love -displayed in costly action. He put himself at risk of attack by robbers by stopping on the dangerous road to Jericho so that he could help a man who had been stripped, beaten and left for dead. He displayed compassion and denied himself by loving the wounded man – unlike the priest and Levite who had passed by on the other side of the road. Not only was the Samaritan’s love costly to his own safety and schedule, it also resulted in him incurring financial expenses in providing care for him at an inn where he could securely recover. Jesus was clearly teaching in this parable that the love God calls us to is to be for **all kinds of people**. Not only all kinds of people who are already disciples of Christ, but also all kinds of people whose ultimate salvation state we do not know.

As if that is not personally challenging enough for you and me, the scope of the command to love one another goes further. Jesus said, “*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”* (Matt 5:43-44). The word ‘love’ here is the same Greek word as is used in our text from John 13 ‘*love one another*’. It is the agape love which is displayed in self-denying costly action.

Jesus knows that we find it much easier to love people who love us, He says *“if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others?* (Matt 5:46-47). The defining love of the disciples of Jesus is not that they love those with whom they are in a mutually loving relationship, but with those who are difficult for them to love.

Think for a moment about people who you know, but (if you are honest about it), you do not like.Perhaps they have offended you in the past. Perhaps they hold very different views from you. Perhaps they have treated you unjustly. Perhaps they are actively opposed to you. Perhaps they are part of your family, a member of your church, a boss, a work colleague, or the person who lives next door to you. Whoever you just brought to mind is included in the command of Jesus to ‘*love one another just as I have loved you”.*

Did Jesus not say of those who crucified Him *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* (Luke 23:34)? Loving like Jesus is impossible for people like us **unless** we are in union with Him, and we bear His loving leading yoke (Matt 11:29-30). He is the reason for us to love one another, which brings us to our final point:

1. **Love for Christ’s sake**

Jesus said, “*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (*John 13:35*).* A hallmark of the disciples of Jesus is their self-denying, costly, love which acts on behalf of all kinds of people, including their enemies. This differs from the love which those who are not disciples of Jesus show for those that love them.

There is a personal benefit for the Christian in knowing that this love for one another is an evidence which gives assurance of salvation in the believer, as John explains in his first letter. However, what is of higher significance is the honour that is brought to Christ when people see the way in which his disciples love. This love demonstrates the power of the gospel to change people so that they can willingly deny themselves and love all kinds of people, even those they don’t naturally like, or who they not attracted to, or who are their enemies.

The reason why this kind of love is such a powerful testimony to the saving work of Christ is that it is the love of God Himself. In saving His people, does God not love the unlovely? Does God not love those who are naturally His enemies? Is God’s love not a self-denying love which cost the life of His Son?

Do we not want everyone to know that we belong to Christ so that we can speak to them about the One who loved us before we first loved Him? Loving one another as Christ commands is difficult because it is personally costly. Loving one another as Christ commands is difficult because to deny ourselves means that we have to put to death our old nature. Loving one another as Christ commands is difficult because there are likely some people in our lives we would like to ignore or even act or think in unloving ways toward them. Yet, loving one another as Christ commands brings great glory to our Lord and Saviour because it shows the power of the gospel and the wonder of God’s transforming grace.

Perhaps like me you have been listening to this sermon and it has become obvious to you that you have not loved in the way that Christ has commanded you? Sure, there may have been times when you denied yourself, but there are other circumstances when you could have loved others, but you did not because you deemed the personal cost to be too high either in terms of your time, energy, finances, reputation or personal priorities. Sure, there may have been many times when you have loved others, but not all kinds of people. Perhaps you have drawn some boundaries in your life which divide off the people you are willing to love from those you have chosen to have nothing to do with. The priest and the Levite in the parable took this approach to life. Sure, you know that you are supposed to love one another, but you’ve never really thought about the dishonour you bring to the Lord Jesus when you don’t. Perhaps you can think about people who know you but do not know that you are a disciple of Christ because you have not loved others as He commands.

The Word of God accompanied by the Holy Spirit is powerful and uncovers us, showing us to ourselves as we truly are. It is not a pretty picture. So, I want to say to you and to myself. Come to Christ, accept the reality that you have not loved one another as He calls you to. Come, in repentance and trust in the love with which Christ has loved you. He denied Himself for you who were once an enemy of God.

Come, rest in the forgiving grace of the Lord. Come, and resolve to love one another as you have not done so before. Commit yourself to love others by denying yourself. Commit yourself to love all kinds of people. Commit yourself to love for Christ’s sake. He says to you, His disciple: “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (*John 13:34-35*).*

AMEN.