

A New Commandment - John 13:31-35

In his book "Written In Blood," Robert Coleman tells the story of a little boy whose sister needed a blood transfusion. She had a rare blood type which she shared with her little brother. The fact that he had recovered from the same disease two years earlier made the chances of success even greater. The doctor carefully explained all this to the little boy, pointing out that without the transfusion his sister would die.

"Would you be brave and give your blood to your sister?" the doctor asked. Johnny hesitated. His lower lip began to tremble. Then he smiled and said, "Sure, for my sister." The two children were wheeled into the hospital room – Mary, pale and thin; Johnny, robust and healthy. He smiled at his sister, and watched as the blood travelled out of his body, down the clear plastic tube. Johnny's smile faded, and as he lay there feeling weak he looked up at the doctor and said, "Doctor, when do I die?"

Johnny thought that giving his blood to his sister meant giving up his life. Yet because of his great love for her he was prepared to pay the price.

This extraordinary act of sacrifice and love is moving and challenging at the same time and begs the question, would I be prepared to sacrifice my life like the little boy thought he was doing for his sister by donating his blood?..... Of course I'd like to think I would.

John 13: 31-35 is a passage of scripture taken from the wider narrative account of when Jesus knew 'His hour had come'. Jesus knows who is about to betray Him. Yet, how does He respond? He announces the imminent betrayal to His disciples, and then proceeds to feed the betrayer: scripture says; "So when He had dipped the piece of bread, He gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot". Judas then leaves to do his work, and the narrator adds, "and it was night".

It is at this dark moment that our text for today begins.

We might expect a lesson from Jesus at this point about how evil Judas is, and how awful the consequences of his actions will be for him. But Jesus instead focuses on His mission and preparing His disciples for what is to come. He speaks of being glorified and of glorifying God, which in Johannine language is a reference to His elevation on the cross.

Then He tells His disciples in tender words (“little children”) that He will be with them only a little longer, and that where He is going, they cannot come.

This conversation continues after with Peter asking, “Lord, where are you going?” and Jesus responding, “Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward”. Peter responds, “Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you”, to which Jesus responds by predicting Peter’s denial of him.

Yes, Jesus also knows that Peter, one of His closest companions, will deny Him. Yet His parting words to His disciples focus not on blame for their past and future failures, but rather on preparing them for what is to come, promising that although He will no longer be physically present with them, they will not be abandoned.

In the coming chapters Jesus will talk about the Holy Spirit the Paraclete, the Advocate who will teach and advise and comfort them. For now, He focuses on the need for His disciples to live in community, **to love one another as He has loved them.**

This “new commandment” -- “that you love one another as I have loved you” -- is in parallel with what Jesus has already told his disciples: “You call me Teacher and Lord, so, if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you

also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you".

The "new commandment" is also paralleled in John 15:12-14: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, than to lay down one's life for one's friends."

These two parallels to John 13:34 help to flesh out the meaning of "**loving one another.**" On the one hand, loving one another as Jesus has loved encompasses the mundane; it means serving one another, even in the most menial tasks. On the other hand, this love encompasses heroic acts of great risk; it extends even to the point of giving one's life for another.

The love of which Jesus speaks, then, and which Jesus demonstrates in His life and death, is a love which extends from the mundane to the heroic and encompasses every kind of self-giving act in between. Jesus tells His disciples that it is by this kind of love that everyone will know that they are His disciples.

Here in chapter 13, Jesus demonstrates His love for the same disciples who will fail Him miserably. Jesus washes and feeds Judas who will betray Him, Peter who will deny Him, and all the rest who will fail to stand by Him in His hour of greatest distress. The love that Jesus demonstrates is certainly not based on

the merit of the recipients, and Jesus commands His disciples to love others in the same way.

We disciples of Jesus have continually fallen far short in our love for one another as well as in our love for those outside the community of faith.

Jesus could not be clearer: It is not by our theological correctness, not by our moral purity, not by our impressive knowledge that everyone will know that we are His disciples. It is quite simply by our loving acts – acts of service and sacrifice, acts that point to the love of God, for the world made known in Jesus Christ.

In 2009 I moved from Blenheim to Tauranga a broken man after my marriage of 27 years failed. It was without any doubt the darkest moment in my life. I was depressed and although I had been a Christian for 29 years I didn't know where God was, I felt alone and scared for what the future would hold for me.

A few months after my arrival to Tauranga I was invited to attend a Divorce Care course at Holy Trinity Anglican Church as a way of helping me to deal with the many issues that arise from a marriage break up. It was at this time I became interested in the Anglican Church in what they were doing in their community. Curiosity got the better of me so I decided to sneak into one of their services to see how the Anglicans did church.

I attended one service, then two and eventually Holy Trinity Tauranga became my home parish.

What I discovered was a community of believers in Jesus who understood, and put into action this 'new commandment' Jesus gave to His disciples, "love on another just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." John 13:34.

The transformative power of love can never be under estimated, for it was through the loving care I received from this community of Jesus followers that changed my life, and also challenged me on what loving the other looks like.

May we spend time to reflect and pray about what love means to us as individuals and as a community of believers. May we invite the Holy Spirit to breath into us afresh as we endeavour to be the hands and feet of Jesus in a world desperate for authentic Christianity that shows what God's love looks like.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.