



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

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Sermon Rev Dr André J Groenewald

Reading John 13: 31-35

The text for the sermon is verse 34

³⁴ *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*

What on earth did Jesus mean when He said He was giving them a new command to love one another?

It is not a new command as such. I mean to say that the Old Testament had commanded love as mentioned in Lev 19:18. The “newness” He is referring to is with regards to the addition of some words He is adding to the command the words “As I have loved you...”

Jesus is not only referring to what He has done for them while on earth but also what He is still going to do for them on the cross and after the cross.

So let us go and have a look at Jesus’ love. It was always full of action and deeds. He included everyone in his message. He was kind and welcoming to all. He never ever turned someone down or sent someone away just because of the low position they had in society.

He showed love in a very concrete way. And because He showed love, people responded. In the Gospel of Luke we find

an example of a response to his love.

Jesus once entered the house of a Pharisee. He was a very important man in that society, as someone who was supposed to know the Scriptures and God, but had no clue of the meaning of God's love. He did not as a common courtesy welcome Jesus in his home by kissing him or providing him with water to wash his feet! Then a bad woman from the street came in and stood behind Jesus' feet. She started to wash Jesus' feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. The only thing she had was her compassion love and tears! The host of the house, Simon the Pharisee immediately responded by saying to Jesus that He defiled Himself by allowing the bad woman to touch him. He must have known she was a sinner!

Then Jesus asked his "host" a question. Tell me, "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he cancelled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt cancelled."

Then Jesus said to his "host": "I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

Is that also true of us? Do we also talk of God's love but never ever practise it like Simon the Pharisee?

Or do we respond to the love Jesus had for us like the sinful woman from the street, wetting and wiping Jesus' feet with her tears and hair. Do we wash the stranger's feet with our tears?

Do we care for those that are less fortunate than ourselves? Do we commit to actions of love every moment of every day? Are we willing to sacrifice everything because of Jesus' love for us! Or do we just give our love to the important people of this world. Do we only show commitment and loyalty to those who are in power while forgetting the poor, the needy, the lonely, the despised, the outcasts, the alcoholics, the drug abusers, and everyone else whom we like to judge and condemn?

I read a story about someone who, also in a crisis, experienced actions of love. A community in Florida had been hit hard by a hurricane, power was out, houses were flooded, roads were closed. At the Red Cross centre at the local middle school, a distraught African-American woman asked tearfully for six flashlight batteries. "My children are afraid of the dark" she explained. "Sorry", came the answer. "Only two batteries to a family. However, if you have relatives living with you, you can have two more for each one."

The woman just stood there paralyzed, feeling helpless, when a bystander, who was not African American, piped up. "I'm a relative." he said. "So am I," announced a young Chinese girl nearby. The Red Cross worker handed the woman six batteries with a smile.

This story reminded me of a very important fact: God is teaching us a lesson. He is telling us to show our actions of love to everyone, even those who are different from us. We must never ever allow custom, tradition, culture nor pomp nor ceremony to distinguish between people. God is love. It is a given although our actions of love are always lacking and failing. Why? - Because we do not grasp the depth or the width of his forgiving love for us. There is no human being more important than the other. Everyone matters to God.

The Lord God is expecting us not to feel love but to show our love. Love is a lifelong commitment to everyone who has faith in Jesus' redemption. It is not an emotional rollercoaster.

The world dislikes us because we are most of the time like Simon the Pharisee. The world despises us because we differentiate between people. The world does not trust our love, because we only show it to a selected few. The world does not believe in our God because we do not tell them enough about His warm Heart and forgiving love for the sinner. To many it seems that when the church does talk to the world they always judge and condemn!

Although some of this is true, I also think we need to tell those who criticize Christian believers, it is time for them to come from the streets, like the woman, to be in the presence of Jesus. I think we need to stop defending ourselves and just challenge people more and more to come and experience God's love through our actions of love. If you have friends that are not believers remember that they are looking at your life to see if there is a difference. They are going to scrutinize your marriage, your relationships, your everyday habits and all your levels of communication.

Maybe we must challenge ourselves to go out of here today and for a whole week:

- Give more of ourselves,
- Laugh as much we can;
- Be positive,
- More loving;
- More forgiving;
- AND
- Stop gossiping,
- Stop being rude or nasty to others,
- Stop moaning about how bad everything is;

In this chapter Jesus is preparing his disciples for his future loving masterpiece namely eternal life. He is saying his goodbyes to them in a loving way. We all know what happened. Jesus died on the cross; He was resurrected from the dead and

ascended to heaven to prepare the new heaven for everyone that has faith.

You and I belong to this new heaven. We have so much to be loving and thankful to God. Let's try to show it more through our actions!

The church father Tertullian quoted the pagans as saying of the Christians, "See how they love one another?" And how do we evidence that love? By doing what Jesus did: laying down our lives for the brethren? And the way to start is by getting down and washing one another's feet in sacrificial service."

Amen