

A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

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“The Whole Enchilada”

John 13: 31-38

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It was a new commandment... spoke into one intense and tender night. All the gospel writers tell us it was intense. John says it was also tender and Jesus was saying things like...

“You’re my friends...”

“Be one with me and God...”

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

By John’s accounting, that last night isn’t just intense, as the other gospels are, it’s tender. In John’s narrative, there is the grand battle about to take place... but there’s also Jesus and his friends... his students that he’s saying goodbye to.

“A new command I give all of you guys...” They lean forward... **“One we haven’t heard before?”**

“It’s that you love one another just like I’ve been loving you.”

Now for my money... not one of them reacted to this with enthusiasm or real interest. Honestly... I’m pretty certain they’d rather have heard something like the Great Commission.

“A new command I give unto you... Go into all the world. Go love everybody.”

It would have been much easier had Jesus said, **“Love the world.”** Loving the whole world, some generic mass of people, not only seemed noble and saint like and exciting... but it also seemed doable.

But loving these people
around this table

with those problems and personalities...

... Wasn’t a new commandment that was all that inviting. They knew one another now and being a disciple provided no insulation from what ailed you... or bugged you.

They had a past and had been through some things.

They’d angered and offended.

They’d picked sides.

There was water under the bridge... and it was still standing.

Three years ago, it would have seemed like a reasonable request... and a commandment they would have been certain they could follow. If Jesus had said, **“I’ve got this new commandment... something I really need from you... make sure you’re loving one another just like I’m loving you,”** they would have reveled in the thought of trying. **“Sure, Jesus, anything for you.”**

And why not... They were all on cloud nine. Unity was easy...

There was this euphoria about Jesus.

There was their common hatred of Rome

And common irritation with the Pharisees.

They all felt special, they’d been chosen... like college students into a fraternity. They were unique, they thought. Ready to do something special and set the world on fire. Like a young couple head-over-heels in love, they saw no end to the amazing feast of affection they were experiencing.

Scott Peck calls this “**pseudo community.**” It feels real in that it’s happening... but it isn’t real intimacy and love. There’s this rush of good feelings. The euphoria, “**We’ve finally found it.**” All sorts of things feeding this... our narcissism and naiveté...

“**It’ll be like this forever...
cause we’re so special...
don’t cha know.**”

But then life happens and differences emerge and impassable develop... It happens to couples... to churches... certainly to disciples who thought they’d finally found the fast track to easy and loving friendships.

But then the crowds Jesus was attracting started dwindling and this bothered them. Empty pews make church-goers feel empty, huh. It felt better when they seemed to be on the winning team.

And the heat was also getting turned up by some in Jerusalem. And when things get hot, people get stressed, and when people get stressed they aren’t their best selves. Maybe, their more honest selves... no more best feet forward... just the stinky feet of humanity.

So, they started saying things without thinking... hurtful things.

Then, like survivors on an island, they’d find themselves talking in small groups... “**Hey, is it me or is James really compulsive.**” “**No, it’s not just you, the guy really is getting to me.**” And it feels better having a partner in frustration. This is the way alliances form. Too hard to bear alone... so we find someone who helps us to survive.

Someone to validate our hurt feelings

Justify my anger.

Approve of my condemnation.

Or bless the boundary I’ve erected.

I know this happened with The Twelve because it happens in every community. It’s just hard... personalities and histories... different opinions and especially when religion is involved. There’s so much at stake.

Can you imagine The Twelve Disciples trying to theologize and get on the same page? There were times when Matthew would say this and John would say that. They remembered things differently.

They disagreed a lot on the interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew insisted Jesus said, “**Blessed are the poor in spirit.**” Others argued that he just said, “**Blessed are the poor.**”

This happened often and sometimes the debates were heated. Some of them stressed Jesus’ words about how hard and narrow the way seemed to be... others in the group wanted to emphasize how inclusive Jesus’ love was.

It was just hard, knowing that two followers of Jesus could see things so differently. It just felt... well... bad.

Everyone had opinions...

And personalities...

And little annoying characteristics.

Bartholomew couldn’t stand the way Thomas was always so negative about everything.

And Thaddaeus, who was an introvert, hated the way that Andrew just went on about everything... he talked constantly.

Simon, the Zealot, was so opinionated... he always had to have the final word and he had some commentary about every story.

Being a disciple was hard enough but being a disciple with other disciples was just a real pain sometimes.

There was Judas, who was the treasurer, and who was always such a tight wad and made everyone justify every thing, down to the last mite.

Nathanael was really full of himself. He thought he was a bit better than the rest because he grew up in Bethsaida and he seemed bigoted towards those who grew up in the Nazareth area.

James, son of Alphaeus, snored.

Philip cussed all the time.

Peter was angry...

John was jealous. Everyone was aware that he was always trying to get next to Jesus... always working for position and attention. He couldn't just be one of the 12, he had to be special and everyone saw this. And sometimes Jesus gave him the attention and everyone would see that too.

That was the reality of being a part of this disciplined bunch. Everything anyone can experience, anytime, in any circle was there...

Prejudice, bitterness, suspicion ...

Irritation, condemnation, comparison...

Different personalities, values, and opinions.

And on that last night (of all nights) it was all in the room. They were so stressed... and angry. Earlier that day some of them had heard James and John actually ask for places of privilege when Jesus ushered in his kingdom.

They'd gotten to the upper room and normally they would take turns with the foot washing detail before they ate, but not on this night, not on your life. No one's going to act "less than" the others.

If that wasn't bad enough, now they had added betrayal to the frustrating, sinful mix in the room. You could taste the distrust in the room.

And here Jesus is, and now he's talking about leaving and he's looking them right in the eye and he's commanding that they "**love one another.**"

"**Love one another, as I have loved you.**" John noted that Jesus qualified it that way. "**As I have loved you.**" Of course, all of them were lifetimes away from being able to pull that off.

But that was the thing Jesus said, while he was saying goodbye. And John having done a lot of life and a lot of church, has to write this down because he knows how much is at stake. The gospel's at stake. And the world and the hope we hold for it is at stake.

Because if followers of Jesus, the one who is love, can't get this... then how can the world? It's the whole enchilada. If the Apostles can't get this, what future does the planet have?

So, it was a command!

Not a request!

A new command.

And the new must have been this qualifier. "**Love...**" was as old as the Ten Commandments.

"**Love each other and do it like I have,**" that's a very particular thing... it's qualified... It's abstract. The disciples had seen love and here's what it looked like... at least... the way I've seen it.

Jesus loved the real. Not some ideal of who Nathaniel might be. He loved Nathaniel... not Nathaniel as Nathaniel ought to be.

When Jesus sat down at that well one day in Samaria with that woman no one would be seen with, he didn't project some image onto her... some notion of what a good middle-eastern woman ought to be. He loved, this woman... questionable past and all.

Often, it's not the real person we love because the person knows that if the real person showed up our love would depart.

Simone Weil talks of moving among people and disappearing so they might show themselves and put off all disguises. **"It is because I long to know them so as to love them just as they are. For if I do not love them as they are, it will not be they whom I love, and my love will be unreal."**

Jesus loved real people so people would be real with him. Because he wasn't among them in a posture of judgment. When he showed up at the party with the tax collectors and prostitutes, he didn't stop all the fun and say, **"Now before we go home, I need to make sure you understand that I disapprove of what you do."**

He just didn't do that...

he wasn't thinking that...

it wasn't in his make-up.

It's not that Jesus said to himself, **"Now, I'm going into this party with all these sinners and I'm not going to act judgmental... it's that he wasn't."**

And the fact that many of you, maybe most of you, are protesting inside and saying, **"Yes but..."** confirms my thinking that few of us adopt Jesus' posture. (Caught you didn't I.)

Yes... Jesus says to the woman caught in adultery, **"Go and don't sin anymore."** He's real and honest about her and helpful to her. But prior to that he says, **"I don't condemn you."**

What are we afraid of? Some silly notion that if we quit judging others all morality gets suspended. What are we thinking... that if we don't condemn someone, the Holy Spirit won't be able to convict them? Is it that we feel better if we've located the sin of another... the speck in their eye? **"Whew!!! It's a tough job but somebody has to do it."**

Or is it just instincts. We live in judgement of ourselves, why not everyone else. I read recently, one of the church fathers saying, **"The cross is the judgement of judgement."** And the mystics all know... ridding ourselves of the judgement of others is the final battle ground in our growth towards Christlikeness.

Jesus doesn't judge, he doesn't need to. He isn't sizing himself up in comparison and contrast to us. He didn't need Philip. He didn't need Thaddeus to prop up his self. He has emptied himself and so he is able to love.

Henri Nouwen said it was dying to others that was necessary in order to love them. As long as you need them to be something for you... Pretty enough, smart enough, liberal enough, affirming enough... successful, pleasant... you can't love them.

There is within you a small self, an imposter, that has convinced you, that you need other people to be certain things in order for you to be well. And as long as we're operating from that imposter... we aren't loving at all.

The reason the disciples couldn't wash each other's feet is that they were still finding their identity in one another. But, John says, **"Jesus, knowing he'd come from God and would return to God... got up and served them."**

You can't love as Jesus loves until you know God as your source and destiny. Until you believe at your core you're beloved. Then you're free. Then you can love. And this is what the journey is about... this is the point, the whole enchilada.

John, our writer and teacher, was on this journey. He'd heard Jesus command it... so he worked towards it. He kept being a disciple... doing life with those Jesus had called together.

He made a commitment to be patient with Nathanael's arrogance.

He told himself that Simon the Zealot was really Simon the Insecure and he determined not to let it bother him when he got pushy.

He prayed for James at night when the snoring kept him awake.

He quit judging Philip for being so foul-mouthed.

And he would confess his sin and receive God's grace every time the green monster of envy crawled up his throat when Peter was in the limelight.

He chose to do these things, patience, mercy, empathy... somewhere along the way, he seemed to be these things.

He took on the responsibility of being Mary's son. Right when his young life was taking off, he was saddled with the weight of a widow.

He made a promise to Jesus and so he made sacrifices. He was inconvenienced often... he couldn't go everywhere he wanted to go... it limited him. But a promise is a promise and he chose to do the unselfish thing... somewhere along the way, he just seemed to be unselfish.

He became pastor of a church. He taught and he cared. He brought them along as believers... slowly... sometimes they moved at a snail's pace. Sometimes they liked him, sometimes it seemed he was the target for everything ailing inside them. And he took it... he chose to act long-suffering and somewhere along the way, he seemed to be that.

He chose to do good and seemed to become good. He chose to offer kindness and became kind.

He found himself exiled eventually, on the island of Patmos. He remembered the wisdom of Jesus, so he prayed for his persecutors. He worked for them freely, he served those who hated him, he chose to forgive them... and somewhere along the way, he seemed to be grace.

John had spent a lifetime going to school on the new commandment, obeying Christ. It wasn't a suggestion, it was a commandment.

He'd always known it was not an easy thing. He knew now, it was no small thing. He knew it was everything.

It was everywhere. Love was the eternal reality. It was not only the end of things but the beginning of all things. It was the cause. It flowed from God's heart and gave life to the whole world.

God's love animated all things. It was not a selfish love that desired and clutched, it was boundless love that knew no barriers. It was a transforming love, to touch it was to touch God's heart, the deepest reality of all and to be there was to be whole.

This was what John learned and what he had to tell. So before he died, he wrote his dear friends.

“Love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. There is no fear in love, perfect love drives out fear. We love because he first loved us. And he has given us this new command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother and sister.” (from John 4: 7-21) Copyright, Burt L. Burleson, 2004