



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Easter 5

May 15, 2022

A New Commandment

John 13:31-35

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. ³³ Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’ ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

From the day of our birth to the day we’re laid in our graves there’s something of vital concern to each of us. If we have it, we’re rich, even if our pockets are empty. Some say it makes the world go ‘round. And it’s true that without it our world remains stuck in the mire of bitterness and hatred. What is it? Love.

Love is a global concept. In the Swiss Alps, the edelweiss flower is prominent in souvenir shops and picture galleries. It’s painted on wooden plates, necklaces, bracelets, and post cards. Travelers are often puzzled by this, because the flower can’t be found growing anywhere. If you ask the locals, you’ll learn the tradition of this simple blossom:

Before a young woman decided upon a suitor, she required proof of his devotion. The young man was to give evidence of his love by climbing dangerous mountain crags where this edelweiss flower grew. He was to search until he found the rare blossom growing in the snow. Then he would pick it, bring it down the mountainside, and present it to her. By this arduous assignment, the suitor was to show the genuineness of his love.

This old Swiss tradition still appeals to the people of the Alpine country and to those who travel there. But to people throughout the world there is an older and sweeter story, which tells of God demonstrating His great love for all mankind. It teaches that God, in the person of His Son, climbed a rocky hill. No, it wasn’t the Swiss Alps, but a more famous hill in Palestine, called Mount Calvary. And there, forsaken by His friends, and even by His heavenly Father, Jesus secured the most precious gift for those He loved – the forgiveness of sins.

Today this lover of our souls speaks to us in the words of our Gospel, as He turns to us and says: “Love one another.”

The night before He offered Himself as the perfect Lamb of God to pay for the sins of the world, Jesus gathered His apostles together to eat the Passover meal with them. It was at that supper that He, the King of kings and Lord of lords, gave the world its greatest example of humility. He stooped down, washed the dusty feet of His disciples,



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and dried them with a towel. He, who rightly could have expected others to wait on Him hand and foot, showed that He “came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

After they finished the meal, Jesus instituted His Holy Supper, giving them His body and blood under the earthly elements of bread and wine. Then He spoke sadly of His betrayal by one of them, indicating that Judas Iscariot would be the one to betray Him.

The disciples must have wondered, then, about the future of the Church, and about their personal future. How do you suppose they felt when Jesus, the One in whom they had placed their hope, announced that He was about to leave them and suffer death on a cross? Of course, He who was able to look beyond Good Friday to the joyous victory of Easter, was able to sense their fear and concern, and lovingly comforted them. He said: “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him . . . Where I am going, you cannot come. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another.”

You see, Jesus knew that they would continue to fuss among themselves about who was the greatest – they had argued about earlier that very evening – so He pleaded with them to avoid all strife and contention, and to love one another. Love was to be the solvent for their difficulties, the cure for their troubles. Jesus added up all the Commandments and summarized them like this: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

But what did He mean by calling this a *new* commandment? The old commandment, given by God through Moses, says that I am to love my fellow man as I love myself, but this *new* commandment tells me that I am to love others, *not as I love myself, but as Christ loves me*. Woah! The difference here is monumental!

Not that the old commandment has been abolished; it still says: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” As members of the human race, we are to love our fellow humans, regardless of any difference there may be between us. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus went even further when He said: “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” Also, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus teaches that we’re not to emulate the priest and the Levite, who passed by on the other side of the road, but to behave as the Samaritan, who, though an outcast, went out of his way to help someone in need. With Adam as our common ancestor, we’re all blood relatives, beloved; and we should not hate or despise one another.

But there’s something else that binds Christians together more closely than the ties of blood; and that’s our common faith. Those who are brothers and sisters physically may be separated eternally – some going to heaven and others to hell – but those who are brothers and sisters in the Faith are bound together by ties that will never be broken. We are members of one great family of believers, and as such, we are to dwell together in love, even now in our earthly life.



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The moment a person receives Christ in faith, trusting in the suffering, death, and resurrection of our Savior in payment for his sins, he becomes a member of a new family – God’s family. He’s not merely German or English or Hispanic or Asian. He’s no longer white or black, slave or free, but, as Paul says, “We are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). People of all ethnicities, languages, and nationalities are our brothers and sisters in Christ. And it is expected, therefore, that we will love one another as Christ has loved us.

God’s love reached its climax, of course, when He sent His Son into this sin-cursed world, so that by His life and passion, Jesus would redeem you and me from sin, death, and the power of the devil. His love was not only perfect and faultless, it was also a devotion dedicated to the salvation of the world He loved.

That love prompted Him to be born of lowly parentage in a humble stable. That love was the motivating power that took Him up and down the countryside, bringing healing to sick bodies, troubled souls, and tormented minds. It was that love that compelled Jesus along the Way of Sorrows that ended at the cross. Yes, “God commends His love toward us in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). “Greater love has no one than this!” Oh, what a beautiful example of sacrificial love! And now this loving Lord asks you and me to walk in His footsteps and to live as He lived. He reminds us that the mark of true disciples is the love we the have for one another. “This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the Propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”

We live in a world where advanced technology is taken for granted. We can send a missile half-way around the world and not only hit a designated building, but we can tell it which window to enter. We carry more computing power in our pockets than took the astronauts to the moon and back. There’s so much we can do, and yet our world is still so cold, so cruel, so smug, so selfish. Education, culture, philosophy – none of these can make this a better world, for they can’t remove negative traits from unregenerate hearts. In such a world of miseries and tragedies, the call is for love – not mere natural affection or liking, but genuine Christlike love, which comes only by grace to those who’ve been reborn through the Spirit of God. Even as our Lord Jesus hates sin but loves the sinner, so we are to hate the evil deeds of others, but love them, striving for the salvation of their souls. Here’s an important truth: Our love for one another, our love for the lost, our love for the stranger and the alien, will be in direct proportion to our understanding of God’s love for us. “Just as I have loved you,” Jesus says, “you also are to love one another.”

The disciples of Jesus give evidence of their discipleship by the sincere and generous love they have toward one another. People can’t see the faith you have in your heart, but they can see your acts of unselfish love and then be attracted to Christ and His church. Without doubt, it’s faith that receives the grace of God that makes someone a Christian, but love *proves* that a person *is* a Christian. “Faith works by love” is the message of the Bible (Gal. 5:6). Anyone who does not love his brother or sister in Christ



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is still unconverted and dead in sin, for Scripture clearly states: “He who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20).

Brotherly love, then, is the mark of a Christian. By this others recognize us. As Jesus says, “By this *all* people will know that you are my disciples.” Different ethnic groups can be recognized by their appearance; different nationalities can be known by their language or accent. But our Lord insists that, as His followers, we are to be known, not by our clothing, skin color, or dialect, but by the mutual love we manifest to one another. The best sermon you can ever preach is simply to reflect the love of God in your life.

“See, how they love one another!” (Tertullian) That’s what the heathen said of believers in the Early Church. Can the world say the same of you and me today? Minucius Felix wrote of those first-century disciples: “They love each other even without being acquainted with each other.” The scholarly Bible translator Jerome tells us that when the apostle John was asked why he constantly said, “Little children, love one another,” he replied: “Because this is the precept of the Lord, and if only this is done, it is enough.”

When selfishness, pride, gossip, hypocrisy, cowardice, flattery, intolerance, and strife are found among those who call themselves Christians, it brings disgrace on the Church and draws the derision of the world. Where there is sincere Christian love in the parish, there should be no cliques, no bickering or dissension, no segregation or discrimination. Oh, that the love of Christ might so fill us, so saturate us, so spill over from us, that the people we meet will know that we are followers of Jesus! Remember: people are watching us! We may lead them *to* God or *away* from God, depending on the way we live. Therefore, let us ask the Holy Spirit to help us live each day so close to God that we can’t help reflecting His love as we walk the path of life.

And we have the assurance that He will. This same apostle John wrote in our Epistle from the Book of Revelation: “Behold! The dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God.” God is with you, beloved. He has given you His love in Christ. There isn’t a single conflict that can’t be resolved by the genuine, God-given gift of love, whether it be in the home, in the church, in society, or between nations.

True Christian love is a most precious fruit and gift of saving faith. It motivates us to place ourselves third – behind God and our neighbor, and we accept this with joy. God increase, according to His mercy, the grace of His love, so that we may walk through this life as genuine disciples of our Lord, loving others as He has loved us. In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen