

Following with Love

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[0 : 00] Have you been on a road trip or driven interstate heading out from Sydney? One of the things I look forward to when I go on a road trip is the big things I get to visit.

If I'm heading up to Queensland, there is the big bananas at Coffs Harbour. If I'm heading down south to Canberra or Melbourne, there's a big merino in Melbourne.

Hitting those landmarks means I'm around halfway to where I'm planning to go to. Today, I feel like hitting one of those big things in the life of disciples.

We have only a few more weeks before we finish the launch of our Finish 25 Vision Series. We reiterate what Steve, our senior minister, said this morning and also at the beginning of the launch of our Vision Series.

This is, follow 25 is like a roadmap for what we want to get to by 2025, our journey into a new stage of life and mission together.

[1 : 10] The journey for us, collectively, as a church, and for us as individuals, to get to a point where we can identify much growth as disciples of Christ, a Christian.

Through our connection in this church as we follow our crucified, resurrected, and exalted Lord Jesus. If you identify yourself as a Christian, a follower of Christ, you are on this journey already. It's time to leave the big banana or the big merino and keep going with the journey. If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, we would love you to join us to find out what it means for you to be on this adventure.

If you have been following our preaching series, we have learned that God has given us his word, which is the Bible, the Holy Spirit, and the church to assist us in our journey of living our whole-of-life discipleship, living a life following Jesus.

We have also looked at how to follow Jesus in our holiness and finance over the last two weeks. If you have missed any of these preachings, you can find them in our website, st.paul's.org.au, or our St. Paul's app.

[2 : 38] And you will find today's outline in our app as well. I will look at the big landmark and ultimate goal of Disciples Review today and next week.

They are signposted by the final words of Jesus in the John's and Matthew's Gospel, respectively. Starting from chapter 13 to chapter 19 of John's Gospel, it recorded the final words of Jesus' life before he was crucified.

And then the final two chapters show us Jesus' resurrection and exaltation. At the beginning of John 13, John says, it was just before the Passover festival.

Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

And as done in verse 33, it keeps saying, Jesus says, God is most commonly labeled as love, and we should not be surprised that love is the hallmark of those who follow him.

[4 : 34] However, are you surprised that Jesus has made love one another as a new command that we must obey today?

If it is love, if we are under obligation or a command to do so. I have four questions I want to answer today from our passage from John 13.

What does Jesus mean by love? What is new about this command? How are we to respond to this command? And what difference are you going to make?

We need to ask the question, what does Jesus mean by love in our current day and age? Because we live in an age that focuses on individualistic value.

Love can mean many different things, and if we are not careful, we may be importing a definition from elsewhere that is not the Christian love that Jesus is talking about.

[5 : 39] As you read through John's Gospel and the whole Bible, you will become clear of what Jesus means by love and how he expressed his love for his own.

That is why we encourage everyone to spend time with God as part of their daily and weekly life, to aim for four or more quality devotional time a week with God.

One important thing for us to take notice from today's passage is the very fact that love is commanded means to focus us on loving action rather than on feeling of love.

When Jesus commands his disciples to love, we are not being commanded primarily to feel something, but to do something, to show love by loving action.

We see from early parts of chapter 13, when Jesus saw love, he does so by washing the disciples' feet. His action may not mean much to you if you do not see it in the eyes of those living in the first century, living around Jesus.

[6 : 54] They wore sandals, no shoes or socks. They walked on unsealed dirt road without curbs and gutter to drain away all the runoff.

They shared a road with animals and whatever they left behind as they go. Can you imagine what the disciples' feet looked like after a day of walking?

Food washing at the time of Jesus was a task generally reserved for the lowest of the manual servant. Some Jews even insist that Jewish slaves should not be required to wash others' feet.

The job was reserved for foreign workers or women or kids. No Jewish man would wash the feet of another man.

But Jesus, bent right down, kneeled before his disciples, washed their feet, including the feet of the one that could betray him.

[8 : 00] And he cleaned it, dried them up with a towel wrapped around him. foot washing is an act of humble, self-sacrifice, sacrificial service that points to the cross where Jesus ultimately showed his disciples how he loved them to the end.

In both of these examples, foot washing and the cross, Jesus does something. He acts. When he commands his followers to love one another, it is a command to act, to show love by loving action, not focus on the feeling of love, but focusing on what action to demonstrate Christian love to one another.

Jesus said, love one another is a new command that he gave them from that point. But what is new about this command? What is highlighted in what Jesus said, follow the sentence, it highlights the newness of this command.

If we go back to verse 34, Jesus said, a new command I give you, love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another.

The faith, as I have loved you, set a new standard how we should love one another. The measure of love for one another is no longer like the song by Hathaway in 1993.

[9 : 41] What is love? Baby, don't hurt me. Baby, don't hurt me no more. The measure of love is no longer defined by reframing from hurting each other. It's no longer measured by loving others as you would love yourself.

The new standard of love is demonstrated by Jesus washing the disciples' feet and laying down his life for us sinners on the cross.

The one who is in very nature, God, made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on the cross. The standard of love set by Jesus is extraordinary and unique.

How Jesus fulfilled the command to love is unprecedented. One scholar says, No one has ever loved as he loved. He gave himself to death not for the righteous or the good, but for the sinful, for the disobedient.

[10 : 52] He gave himself up to death for his friends, not for his friends, but for those who love him, but for those who denied and forsook him, for his enemies, for those who hated him.

Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, also illustrated the rarity and uniqueness of Jesus' action in chapter 5, verse 6 to 8. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person. Though for a good person, someone might possibly dare to die, but God demonstrated his own love for us in this.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Jesus repeated the love command in chapter 15 of John's gospel in verse 12 to 14.

Jesus said, My command is this, love each other as I have loved you. Greater love is no one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

[12:09] You are my friends if you do what I command. He is ready to lay down his life for his friends, knowing full well that within a short time, they will desert him and deny him.

What is new about the command is a new standard that Jesus has set for us and for his followers. The standard is so high.

So how are we to respond and fulfill this command? Bible scholar Don Carson says, This new command is simple enough for a toddler to memorize and appreciate, profound enough that the most mature believers are repeatedly embarrassed at how poorly they comprehend it and put it into practice.

At this moment, thinking about what Jesus has done to wash the disciples' feet and die for us on the cross, some of you may feel embarrassed. Maybe you're still enjoying too much fun at the Big Banana or the Big Marino and have not got back in your car to keep on with the journey.

Maybe it's a sense of guilt, worrying about what others will think of you if they find out how immature you are or how your spiritual life is going.

[13:41] You are not alone. In the whole Bible, the person that knows what it means to embarrass himself in front of Jesus will be Peter. After hearing Jesus' command to love one another as he has loved them, this is Peter's reply in verse 36 of chapter 13.

Simon Peter asked him, Lord, where are you going? Jesus replied, where I am going you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.

Peter asked, Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you. Then Jesus answered, will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.

Peter self-confidently proclaimed that he will lay down his life for Jesus, was met with Jesus repeating his word as a question, will you really lay down your life for me?

After all, who is laying down his life for whom? Peter's response highlights one of the common human nature and weaknesses, especially when it comes to love.

[15:01] We often quit to speak and make promises but fail to deliver. And there's another deeper issue illustrated by his response, but translated differently in modern day Christian, the issue of pride and independence.

instead of responding with a determination in the affirmative, we often respond to God's command in the negative.

When we are asked to consider to be a leader or disciple to help others to love and serve God, we are very quick to say no, very quick to come up with reasons why we are not suitable to fulfill God's command.

Jesus said in chapter 14 of John verse 15 to 17, if you love me, keep my commands and I will ask the Father and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever, the spirit of truth.

And then in chapter 15 when he repeated this command, he says again, you did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit, fruit that will last and so that whatever you ask in my name, the Father will give you.

[16:31] We are to respond to Jesus' command by the empowerment of God, the Holy Spirit, the advocate that sent to us at the request of Jesus to be our helper.

If you intend to be fruitful in living for God, whatever you ask in Jesus' name, the Father will give you. What is impossible with man is possible with God.

Our relationship with God has a direct correlation to how well we follow and fulfill God's commands and that is one reason why we have set our objective to identify much growth in our relationship and knowledge of God.

the high standard set by God is meant to drive us in a closer relationship with him. Independent from God, it will be impossible to fulfill God's command to love one another as Jesus has loved us. Away from God, we can do nothing. But on the contrary, as disciples remain in Jesus, keeping close to him, praying for help and strength, we experience the power of the indwelling spirit.

[17:51] Because of this and only because of this we can love. With the spirit's help, we have the power to change and know what it means to love the Jesus way.

Jesus commands his followers to love one another as he has loved us. And love is a big thing in Christianity. It's by our love for one another that everyone will know that we are Jesus' disciples. We are primarily talking about the interaction between Christian brothers and sisters here. John's gospel reports Jesus giving his love command in the final week before his crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation.

We saw how Peter respond to Jesus' prediction of his imminent departure. The other three gospels, Matthew 20, Mark 10, and Luke 22, reported how the other disciples responded to Jesus' departure and what Jesus said to them.

All these three gospels reported that instead of loving and serving one another, the disciples argued and fought for the top position and disputed about who is the greatest among them.

[19 : 27] And Jesus replied to the argument in Mark 10, verse 42, you know those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their high officials exercise authority over them, not so with you.

Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

I've been talking about Jesus' commands to love one another. Why do I concur by addressing the issue of exercising authority and lording over others?

I'm putting myself on notice because our attitude and handling of authority are strong determinants of whether love is lived out in Jesus' way.

and whether we will get to our destination of intentionally discipling each other to treasure Jesus in all of life. At church, at home, and while I had my own office before, I would become aggressive in my language or tone to control others or manipulate them to agree with my points or do things my way.

[20 : 57] or project my disappointment or even sometimes say it out loud to them. My sense of entitlement and use of authority come out at the worst when I need things to be done.

I want to be served and I want things to be done. I completely ignore the fact that Jesus gave his life to ransom me and those I am speaking to.

And he is in control of our life, not me. And that's why I need to bring us back to that point. As we love others, we need to be careful in how we exercise our authority.

Jesus has given his life to restore all wrong we have done against God and each other. And we can be sure of that by looking at Peter's life. At the end of John's Gospel, in chapter 21, Jesus gave Peter three occasions to declare his love for him, one for each time he disowned him.

Peter can let his failure determine who he is or accept the grace that Jesus Christ gave him and make a change. After his restoration, in the end, Peter responds to the command that Jesus gave him.

[22 : 37] A very simple two-word command in verse 19 of chapter 21. Jesus said this to indicate the count of death by which Peter would glorify God.

Then he said to him, follow me. Jesus responded to this two-word command by Jesus to follow him, and he did follow Jesus to his death in Rome about 30 years after Jesus' crucifixion.

In Peter's letter to the churches, he identified himself as a weakness of Christ's sufferings, drawing attention to his life's biggest failing, to magnify the big love that he experienced from Jesus.

And Jesus' love for him enabled him to shepherd and take care of those that God entrusted to him after his big failure. In 1 Peter chapter 5 1-7, he is speaking to the old and the young, to those leading and those being led.

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's suffering, who also will share in the glory to be revealed.

[24 : 10] Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be, not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve, not lulling it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

And when the cheap shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourself to your elders.

All of you, clothe yourself with humanity towards one and other because God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.

