

A new commandment

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Date: 25 September 2011

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[0:00] Second reading is from John 13, verses 18 to 38, and can be found on page 1045 in the Pew Bibles. I'm not referring to all of you, I know those I have chosen, but this is to fulfil the scripture.

He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me. I'm telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am he. I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me, and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.

After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me. His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, ask him which one he means. Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, Lord, who is it?

Jesus answered, it is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish. Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.

[1:17] What you are about to do, do quickly, Jesus told him. But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the feast, or to give something to the poor.

As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out, and it was night. When he was gone, Jesus said, Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.

If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now, where I am going, you cannot come.

A new command I give you, love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. 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.

[2:23] Then Jesus answered, Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth. Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times. Thanks, Adam.

Will you join me in prayer as we begin? Gracious Lord and Father, we pray that by your Spirit, you might bring your word alive in our hearts, in our minds, and in our lives, so that you might be glorified amongst us.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. We'll be looking at John 13. If you're taking notes, I'm going to be talking about four things.

First is the problem of invisibility. Second is love, life, and death. Thirdly, love and glory. And lastly, Julian's problem.

Firstly, problem of invisibility. Now, I think it's actually quite cool to be a geek nowadays. So...

[3:31] That's why I'm going to proudly make a reference to Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy.

Now, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. In this series, there's a thing called the SEP.

Can anyone tell me what it is? It's called the Someone Else's Problem Field. Okay? So, if you want to hide something, right, to make it invisible, what you do is you make it as gary and disgusting as possible, even in the middle of a field.

You know, you paint something purple with, you know, stars and all that sort of stuff. And what happens is the thing becomes protected from unwanted eyes.

And that's because it's somebody else's problem. That's how you make something disappear. You know, if you want to disappear, you know, pretend that you need something from someone. [4 : 50] And then suddenly, you're gone. It's not so much become invisible, but unnoticed. It's a really cheap way, you know, if our governments could figure out a way of putting that into military technology.

There you go, Adam. S-E-P. The reason why I mention that is because it's almost, I don't know, like, we had a combined service today at Willoughby Council.

The Christian witness in Chesswood, I think, is almost like an S-E-P. You know, how many people actually notice that we exist? Like, how many people notice that St. Paul's meet here on a Sunday evening to worship God?

How many people actually care? Well, I imagine this is kind of it. We disappear. We become unnoticed to the rest of our society.

What will take us to do to become noticeable? You know, it's the opposite of S-E-P. If there was an anti-S-E-P, how will we become visible?

[6 : 06] How will we individually and corporately make an impact to the rest of the people around us? Did you notice that this is the type of thing that Jesus is concerned about here in John 13?

Come with me to John 13, 34 and 35. The passage that I'm sure you all know and love and are familiar with, and this kind of becomes invisible to us sometimes.

Reading from the ESV, Jesus says, 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. And notice what he says.

If you do this, this is what happens. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. To overcome invisibility, all you need is love, apparently, according to Jesus.

Before we turn to that, just very quickly, background. We're spending the next few weeks on chapter 13, I think on to 17 of John's Gospel.

[7 : 23] I can't remember, I haven't checked the roster. But to orient you, the first 12 chapters of John's Gospel talks about the first three years of Jesus' life, so three years, and from 13 to about 17, kind of the last few hours, which is kind of disproportional to the rest, and is essentially one single conversation.

So three, four chapters of John's Gospel, as opposed to the rest, just focus on one conversation, which kind of suggests to you that that conversation must be really important.

Really important for John to spend so much ink recording it for our benefit. And when you read it, it's kind of understandable.

You know, all through John's Gospel, Jesus makes these amazing promises. I am the bread of life. If you come to me, you'll never hunger. But when you get to the last few hours of Jesus' life, he says to his disciples and us, see you later.

I'm going. And, well, if he's not going to be around anymore, presumably, what he says is going to be quite significant for the people who've invested their whole life into Jesus.

[8 : 55] And we're in a similar situation. We don't see Jesus face to face. And he's invited us to invest our life into him. So what he says to his disciples, I guess, are relevant to us.

Why should we keep investing our life into him? What does it mean for us who have invested our life into Jesus to live in a time that he's absent from us?

Well, we'll come to that. Love, life, and death. A focus of the topic is the new commandment, a commandment of love.

But it's important for us to understand the context in which it appears. Yes, it appears in a context of that one long conversation. But it's a little bit more specific than that.

It's very odd. The first, if you turn to it, before he talks about the new command, 18 to 30, is focused on the betrayal of Judas.

[10 : 12] And I don't know what you think of it. It sort of struck me as kind of like an odd logic to it. Why is the commandment of love following what he was saying about Judas?

Well, let me make the first point that love, the commandment of love, appears in the context of life and death. That's the context. It's clearly a life and death situation for Jesus.

He was going to be betrayed by one of his own, which lead eventually to his execution. It's not an idea that is new in John's gospel.

Jesus spoke about it back in chapter 6, verse 71. So back in those chapters ago, he spoke about his betrayal. And chapter 12, again, he spoke repeatedly about his betrayal. But there's something new that happens. Again, there's a bit of a time reference throughout John's gospel. Now is not the time. Now is not the time. But suddenly, in chapter 13, there's this little reference that says, now is the time.

[11:22] Now is the time. We sort of pass some point of no return. When Judas made up his mind to betray Jesus and he's gone out to get the enemies of Jesus, that was it.

That was it for Jesus. It would lead to, eventually, his arrest and execution. The Rubicon had been crossed. The die had been cast. This is it for Jesus.

It was life and death for him. But it's not just life and death for him. It is life and death for you and for me.

I don't know whether you thought about this point. Like all the talk of Judas, what's the relevance of that to you? What's the take-home message of that?

Well, if you come with me to verse 19 of chapter 13, Jesus kind of explains why he was going on about Judas betraying him.

[12:27] Did you notice? He says, I'm telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place, when it does take place, what happens? Have a look at it.

That you may believe. It's an odd sort of word.

He doesn't say, so that you may know. He's that you may believe that I am he. All the things that he's been talking about with Judas is so that the disciples and us will come to believe that Jesus is he, that he is to Christ.

Now, John used very similar language in chapter 20, verse 31. If you flip forward a few chapters, John chapter 20, verses 30 to 31, kind of like a summary of what the whole book is about, John says, John says, John says, John's gospel, John is, and this appeals to me and maybe to some of you, John's been acting like a lawyer.

Geeks and lawyers. And he's been trying to prove a point. And what he does is he brings forward these witnesses as lawyers do in court.

[14:24] And these witnesses prove certain things. That's what lawyers do. They're called signs, but another word for it in John's gospel is they're witnesses. John brings out all these witnesses to show, to demonstrate to you that Jesus is the chosen, special king of God who can give you life.

It is in his hands that he holds your life and he can give it to you. That's what he's been seeking to prove. Now, you might be thinking, possibly, well, why do I need life from Jesus?

For I'm already alive. I'm sitting there, or you seem to be alive. You know, most of you aren't because you're not laughing at my jokes. But that's maybe more me than you.

Why do we need life from Jesus? Well, this week I went to a training thing with a lady by the name of Elizabeth McKinnon. She is an expert on aging.

And she reckons that we live in a culture that denies aging. As in, it doesn't happen, or it doesn't happen to me, or it's something that could be stopped.

[15:46] You know, there's certain things that you can do. You know, aging is a terrible thing, but it sort of sets itself in a wider context. Not only does our culture deny aging, but we deny death.

Death doesn't happen. It's sort of medicalized. It's something that happens out there. It doesn't happen in our midst. It could never happen to me, particularly if you're young.

But if you're older, death is not something that could happen to the people around you. And so when it does happen, it takes us completely by surprise. My wife died.

My husband died. My children died. It's so unexpected. And what McKinnon was saying is that we need to accept the reality that we will die.

That death is a reality. In fact, the reality is we are as good as dead. And she has this wonderful line.

[16:46] She says that life is a terminal disease. You know, you don't need to be diagnosed with cancer or anything else. The day that you are born, you are born to die.

I don't know if anyone's ever brought to you, or you brought anyone, like those beautiful flowers from the forest.

Gorgeous. You know, something I do for my wife all the time. And, actually, I don't, because I think it's such a waste. I mean, how long do they last?

A week? Like, you know, you prolong, you put things in it, whatever. Why do they only last for a week? Because they're dead. By the time, it leaves the shop and goes in your, they're already dead.

They're dead because they've been cut off from the source of their life. And we are like those flowers, beautiful for a season.

[17 : 52] A really short time, in fact, but we are ultimately cut off from the source of our life, and we are dead. We are the walking dead. And John says, if you put your life into Jesus' hands, if you believe that he is the Christ, he will give you life instead of death.

if not, you are already dead. See, this is, this is the context of the command to love, and I'll show you the link between the two.

But, just to assure you, in case you haven't heard this before, Christianity is not just a touch of religion and morality in your life.

It's not just about coming to church on a Sunday night. it is a matter of life and death. It is centered on Jesus, the one who has power to give you life.

Love, life, and death. Love, and glory. What's the link between life, and death, and love?

[19 : 07] Come with me to verse 31, to the sort of immediate context of the love commandment.

The context is this, the context is Judas left, verse 31, is when Judas had left that Jesus gave the commandment.

The only people who were left were the disciples, you know, the one, the pretend, the fake one had left, the one who looked like a disciple was no longer there, and Jesus turned to those who are real disciples to give them this direction, to give them this command.

The important thing is, in other words, you are not trying to love in order to be a disciple. It's the other way around.

You are a disciple of Jesus, that's why you love. you are not trying to love in order to get life out of Jesus, it's the other way around.

[20 : 16] You love because you have experienced life from Jesus, and so you act like someone who is alive. If you're like everybody else, then you act like a dead person.

if you've experienced life, if you receive life from Jesus, then you act like you are alive. And living people love.

Living people love because God is love. The very source of our life is love.

life. And I want to show that to you from verses 31 and 32. When Judas had gone out, Jesus says, now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him.

If God is glorified in him, God will glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. One of the words that gets repeated, and it's one of those Sunday school Bible study things, what do you think that verse is about?

[21 : 22] is the word that gets repeated and it is the word glory. Okay? So glory, you know, but what's glory?

What does that mean? It's, in a non-religious way, it kind of means splendor and majesty and something that's wonderful. So to demonstrate, you know, what is the glory of Sydney?

The harbour. I thought you were going to say, sing pause, but what is the glory of Queensland?

I don't know. Yeah. What is, what is, what is the glory of sing pause? Oh, that's an interesting one.

What is our splendor? What is, hmm. What about you? What would you say your glory is? What is the, what is the thing that shows you your splendor that other people from around the world would go, wow, that's, that's amazing.

[22 : 29] Is it your house that demonstrates and reveal your tastefulness and your wealth and your cleverness? Is it your name, your reputation, that you have a good name?

Or maybe, for the parents, maybe it's your children. they're successful, they achieve a lot, and they are your glory. Here, Jesus says, God's glory, the supreme moment in which he shows the universe, his splendor, is in the death of his son.

not success, not achievement, but humiliation, shame, and ultimately, death.

Jesus is very clear that the death of Jesus ultimately, definitively, most clearly, show the splendor of God, for at the cross, we see that God is love.

Did you notice what Jesus says? The father glorifies whom? The son. The son glorifies himself?

[24 : 05] No. the son glorifies the father. The son's concern is that the whole universe would know what a great dad he has.

The father's concern, all-consuming concern, is that all universe would honour the son as they honour him.

God eternally and forever within himself is utterly other person centred. He doesn't need us. He's eternally within himself sufficient in relationship of love. That's why it is not surprising in verse 34 Jesus says what does he say?

New commandment I give to you that you love one another just as I have loved you. And by all this people will know that you are my disciples if you have loved one for another.

[25 : 24] We are if we belong to God if we have experienced life from God this is what characterise us as a people.

We are what he is like. We are people of love. We love. That's what the children of God do. We love. But there is one problem that really stumped me when I was reading this during the week. Verse 34. I don't know whether you noticed it. Anything that sort of strikes you as kind of odd? A little adjective in there that you kind of think doesn't really quite belong.

New. Why is that there? I mean if you read the whole of the Old Testament Deuteronomy 6. 5 Leviticus 19.

18 which Jesus quote from when he was asked what's the greatest command and he said love the Lord your God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself.

[26 : 36] There it is in the Old Testament. So what is so new about what Jesus is saying have you noticed? That really got me stumped. I mean in the Old Testament love your neighbor as yourself just in case you thought that's just easy to do because I don't like myself so I'm just going to treat everybody else the same.

Think about when you're hungry what do you do? You eat you feed yourself when you're tired you rest when you're sick you don't just ignore it you take your medicine you see this is how you care for your body this is how you love yourself and in the when they see them sick they're supposed to that's the Old Testament what is Jesus saying here what is new about what Jesus says does Jesus say here a new commandment I give to you love your neighbor as yourself no Jesus says love one another as I have loved you you could even say that Jesus is someone who loves his neighbors more than himself if he loves his neighbor he loves well we're not his neighbor we were his enemies if he loves himself he might even live beyond the age of 33 to even my age he might live to see his children but what the gospel tells us is that he loves you more than he loves himself he would rather go hungry so that you can be fed he would rather absorb

God's anger so that you can be saved it's a I think it's a different standard it's a much more different love the people around you more than you love yourself in fact not just your neighbors love people who hate you who are indifferent who are proud love those people more than you love yourself but I think Jesus gives us more than just rules because it sort of struck me that's where's the first greatest command where's the love you would have thought Jesus would have included it here I think what Jesus gives us is more than just more rules and if you think about it that's kind of you know if you can't even love your neighbor as yourself how do you hope to love your neighbors more than yourself so kind of like a higher standard makes it even I think what Jesus does is he gives us more or a new power to do that which we cannot do to do a godlike thing what

Jesus does is he invites us to believe that he is to Christ and in doing so he gives us life he gives us life by drawing us into the life of God himself and when we're drawn into the life of God what happens is he changes the change is so dramatic that in in John chapter four he calls it a rebirth it is almost as if you go back into your mother's womb and you come out again but this time as a completely different person this is what Jesus does for you and me he takes you and he gets rid of the old selfish hateful mean spirit you and he makes you into him who loves his enemies more than himself it's not surprising this is why Jesus says if you love like that people will know you are my disciples people will know

God love because you are being God like why don't we love like that I don't know do you feel that love here at St.

[30 : 44] Paul's do you feel that love in your family do you think you are doing it let me suggest a couple possibilities it might be because you don't know that love that's a possibility if you've never been loved you don't know how to show love if you haven't been loved like the way Jesus loved you maybe that's why you can't love that's possible if that's you if you don't know life don't know love then maybe tonight is the time to change that it's okay even if you've been coming here to church for a long time but what about through those of us who are disciples of Jesus who know that life

who know Jesus let me suggest maybe three possibilities one thing is love is really inconvenient have you ever noticed when people ask for help they tend to do it at the most inconvenient time and in the most inconvenient way

I had this lady asking me to help her pack up and move her house on Friday and I thought that's just really inconsiderate because Friday is my day off and on Saturday I'm going surfing with Ian why can't she move in at a time maybe that's why we don't love it's too inconvenient maybe we don't love because of time we just don't have time to love people you know we're all so busy do you know why you're so busy have you thought about it it's not a time management issue I reckon the reason why you and I are so busy because we are really important people that's right not everyone but you you're important I'm important other people aren't and that's why we got to spend all time doing our really important stuff because that's what important people do we don't have time on trivial things with well unimportant people and ministers are great at this sort of stuff by the way because we look really busy so that people will think that we are very important people we've got busy things to do and we like to maybe that's why third possible reason is in order for me to love you unfortunately it means that you need to get to know me and that's really bad because I spend a lot of time and a lot of energy cultivating this image for you that you think that I'm a really godly smart person and if you get to know me like my children do and you come to my house you will see that yes I do shout at my kids and at times

I am incredibly inconsiderate towards my wife and I don't think I'd like you to know that but for me to love you for you to be involved in my life you will know how terrible I am maybe that's why we don't want people to know us maybe it's to do with our eyesight you know we don't love because we're short sighted our horizon never goes beyond our retirement or our legacy or next weekend or next year if that is our horizon then you pretty much don't need love to get there in fact love most of the time will slow you down if you need to go to where you want to go considering other people along the way is going to stop you achieving they might even get in your way but if your horizon is beyond that into heaven into the bosom of your father in heaven seeing the people around you being loved by him then maybe it's possible that you will feel that love you will need love like you need oxygen to breathe couple of reasons well

SEP the invisibility of us and the church that wasn't always the case by the way Christians were very well known at one stage not just 200 years ago but back a long time that was a this is the conclusion Julian's problem Julian was an emperor of Rome he was called the apostate the reason was Constantine in the fourth fifth century was supposed to have been converted the whole empire became Christian because of him supposedly and one of his successes this guy called Julian decided I'm going to be a pagan and I'm going to get the whole empire to become pagan once again except he's really smart because he's a student of history and he saw that the problem with Christians is that they're like cockroaches you can't get rid of them so you can't spray them you can't persecute them you can't do violence to them in fact the more violence you do to Christians the more the gospel spreads so he wrote this letter to one of these pagan priests to try to do what the Christians do and this is what he said why do we not observe that it is there that is the Christians benevolence to strangers they care for the grace of the dead and the pretended holiness of their lives that have done much to increase atheism atheism that is unbelief in the pagan gods ironic we're atheists there you go for it is disgraceful that when no Jew ever has to beg and the impious Galileans that is Christians support not only their own poor but ours as well all men see that our people lack aid from us teach those of the Hellenic faith to contribute to public service of this sort he's saying do what the

[37 : 29] Christians do and paganism will flourish he is a pagan emperor trying to snuff out the gospel in the empire the world around us keep changing the values they want to change the laws and we want to fight them in the schools in the parliament but what was it that stopped the empire reverting back to paganism it was love wasn't it love that commands the truth of the gospel I wonder whether if the glory of our church is the love of Christ whether we will be shining so bright that not even a bushel can hide us 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 but as all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another what do to do before i see that would do break this here I oh what do