

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fourth Sunday After Easter, May 10, 2020

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 351, 349:1, 349:2-7, 431, 53:4-6.

Lessons: Psalm 85, Romans 13:1-10, John 21:15-17.

Sermon Text: John 13:31-35.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

How often do we hear words which do not express love, evil words, name-calling, lies and harsh words which defame someone? How often do we hear the word hate? Do you remember the last time you heard the words “I hate you”? Hate is a very common and popular emotion but hate is still evil unless it is to hate sin. It is so easy to just say whatever is on our minds at the moment. It seems that fewer and fewer people take time to think about how their words may hurt someone – even fellow Christians – before they say or write something.

Jesus speaks of love in our text. The English word love can have many meanings. We often must look at the context of the word in English to understand what kind of love is spoken of. The King James Version of the Bible uses the word “love” about 310 times. It is found about 550 times in the New International Version, and about 597 times in the English Standard Version, another good English translation. The Greek language has several words that are translated “love” in English. In a few minutes we will talk about those Greek words.

There are several ways of motivating people, motivating them even to stop using behavior and words and showing such attitudes as hate. Law is one way of motivating people, with its fear of punishment. When a child is misbehaving what is the first thing that parents typically might think of? Laying down the law? Forcing them to behave? Disciplining them in some way by applying law? It is true that because everyone still has the sinful flesh, we all need the law, especially God’s commandments.

But love is another way of motivating people, and that is especially true when we are contrasting God’s Law and God’s love. Really seeing and understanding God’s boundless love for us will motivate us to greater sanctification. By God’s love we are thinking of the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins because of the work of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is what will ultimately motivate people to fight and beat down their sinful flesh and seek to live God-pleasing lives.

Jesus speaks of that kind of love in our text when he tells us

“LOVE ONE ANOTHER”

- 1. Today let us remember the occasion on which Jesus spoke these words.**
- 2. This is Jesus’ command to all his followers.**
- 3. What this word “love” really means.**

Jesus has brought love into the world, a love that is not only a perfect love but love that is to give salvation for the world. It is a love that puts others first. To many, this is a “new” love, something they have never considered or experienced.

Remember that Jesus loved all men so much that he died for them all. God his Father and Jesus Christ himself gave this love. ***“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*** John 3:16 (NIV) Only his disciples, all Christians, know what this love is.

When Jesus spoke these words, he was in the upper room with his disciples and had just dismissed Judas Iscariot who would go and lead his captors to Jesus in Gethsemane. No sooner had Judas left the room than

Jesus turned to his disciples with a series of beautiful, comforting sayings. They needed strength and consolation for the time of tribulation that would soon strike them. Jesus now shows the eleven how he and his Father will be glorified, and the love that should fill them as it fills him.

The first steps in his glorification have been accomplished. He has been glorified through all the miracles of his life, and is now to be glorified through the greatest miracle of all, which will follow his death and burial. God is glorified in the Son. God was in Christ. God is the cause of his glorification, which would glorify the Father, too. When the Son had accomplished the work of salvation, the Father as well as the Son would receive honor and glory for the benefit for the whole world.

Jesus calls them ***“my children”***, because through faith they have become children of God. There is work for them to do on earth. And that work must be done in love.

The need of true, fervent brotherly love became apparent that night. They had known before that they should love all men as their neighbors; but here they are given a new commandment, that they should love one another. It was a kind of love which often had not been practiced up to that time, and is practiced all too seldom today. Their display of brotherly love should be a sign, a way in which the people in the world might recognize them as Jesus’ disciples. The standard of this love is the love of Jesus for them and for his disciples of all times. The climax of his love came with his giving his life as a ransom. That is the ideal which should always be present in the minds of all Christians, that everyone deny himself in the interest of brotherly love. When Christians love one another fervently then it will be seen by whoever is looking that they are disciples of the Son of Man who laid down his life for his sheep, and who, by dying, became a ransom for all.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” This command is made in the Gospel sense of good and gracious commands for our sanctification. This is not an eleventh commandment. This is new in the sense that it encompasses all of the commandments. Do you remember how Jesus summarized the commandments of Moses? He was asked ***“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law? Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”*** Matthew 22:36-39 (NIV)

It was new in that it must be new every morning, that our attitude, our words, and our actions follow this command, this precept. Think of Jesus’ words: ***“Love your neighbor as yourself,”*** which reaches out to all men, even to our enemies and to those people of whom we may not be very fond. But look at the newness which Jesus himself points out: that you keep loving each other ***“just as I loved you.”***

The newness Jesus has in mind is not strange and startling to the disciples. It is familiar to them because they have seen it in Jesus in the three years they have spent with him.

The love Jesus commands is the highest form of love. The Greek language has several words for love.

One is a word that means ‘to lust after’, the crudest, lowest, form of what some people today sometimes call “love”. This is the word Jesus used when he said: ***“But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”*** Matthew 5:28 (NIV)

This second word translated “love” is a word that speaks of friendship between two people – people who see endearing qualities in each other and on that basis like each other. It is a love of friendship, a being fond of someone. In our Gospel lesson you heard a conversation between Jesus and Peter in which Jesus asked Peter if he loved him. Peter’s answer, meaning a friendship-love, is the only word Peter could or dared to use when Jesus asked Peter if he loved him. Peter had boldly claimed he would never deny Jesus and yet he did – three times, publicly! Although Jesus now asked him two times if Peter loved him with the highest kind of love, which is the word used in our sermon text, all Peter could humbly claim was that he loved Jesus with a friendship love. The third time Jesus used the word for friendship love.

The third word we are talking about today is the highest kind of love, a love that will give up everything, and even sacrifice one’s life for someone else. This is the word “agape” (uh ga` pay). It is the word found in John 3:16: ***“God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*** (KJV) The word in our text is this highest kind of love, a love that will give up its own life to save someone else. It is a love and affection that is totally one-way. It all comes from

God. Nothing in man the sinner, the God-hater, drew God to him. This kind of love was the love found in the heart of God.

This is the kind of love Jesus is encouraging, commanding, and asking for, and wants his followers to show and express with their lives.

This isn't really new in that the disciples of Jesus have seen and heard the sinless Son of God showing, exercising, doing, practicing this kind of love. And in the next 24 hours they will see the outcome of that love.

But it is new in that they are now to do, to exercise, to practice, to live this kind of love! This word agape is used 142 times in the Greek New Testament. This is an unselfish, one-way love not seeking anything in return. This is God's totally unselfish love for us.

God's agape moved him to give us such great and precious blessings, not because we could return or pay back his love but simply out of his boundless goodness and mercy, his grace. His unselfish love moved him to do everything for us.

This is love that sacrifices for others. How will people know we are disciples of Christ? We will practice that kind of love, especially for one another.

The word "new" here means "fresh" and having new quality. Jesus' command was to love one another as he had loved them. From that night on, all of Jesus' disciples were to practice love in the light of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. As Jesus loves all men, so, of course, should his disciples also love all men.

He is talking of love made possible by the unity of faith and confession and is shown in the hearts of those concerned about others. And this word is used here to express continuous loving. The model set by Jesus sums up all the love he has already shown them and all the love he will show by his sufferings and death on the cross.

"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." In this way everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love among each other. Jesus emphasizes this love and its continuation. Where it exists, it is bound to show itself, and, although it is never boastful or self-praising, those around us will see and thus "know" or realize its presence. Because it comes from God, it will affect them, and through the working of God's Word, also draw them into this circle of love.

This love is not a tolerance of continued sinning but it is a forgiving love, forgiving one another as we live lives of repentance.

One writer said of Christians, "They love each other even without being acquainted with each other." John in his epistles is repeatedly telling us ***"Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."*** 1 John 3:18 (ESV)

Wherever the beginning of the new life from God is found in man, the beginning of this love is also found. It is not human nature which brings this about, but only the work of God. This love is not found in natural man who has not come to faith in Jesus Christ. God created mankind with his law in their hearts, which we call 'natural law'. Every human has some remnants or vestige, however weak those scraps may be, of God's law written in his or her heart. But Jesus is talking about love which must come from outside of man.

Those who have been born of God by the power of the Word and sacrament have been given this kind of love, which must continue to grow as it is fed by the Word of God throughout the lifetime of the Christian. This love grows out of faith in Christ, who says ***"as I have loved you."***

"If you have love among each other" invites a test, and Jesus expects this test to be met. Still, false disciples will appear. Even the world may discover that they are false, that they are hypocrites, by their lack of love.

We should ask ourselves each day: Do I have this love which Jesus commanded to his disciples on the night in which he was betrayed? How many Christians show malice, spite, hatred, coldness, enmity to each other? Where there is no love, there can be no discipleship.

The love of Christians cannot reach perfection as long as the flesh dwells in us, but this love unfolds more and more as the flesh is overcome daily, until it reaches its full glory when we attain the glory of Christ in heaven above.

But we daily ask God: put your love into my heart, so that my attitude, the words I use, my actions, and all I do may serve you and show love for all mankind, and especially for the brotherhood of faith. Amen.