

“Love one another!”

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Please note that these are my rough sermon notes which are published on the website with the deaf particularly in mind. You can download the audio file from the website.

John 13:1-17

cck/06/04/2008

One of the areas I believe that God has been speaking to us about in the last while has been the subject of hospitality and community, and what he wants to do and form in us in this regard.

And so this evening we are beginning a new sermon series in which Andrew and I are going to be preaching on the subject of Community and looking at the “one another” statements that Jesus makes in the Gospels and which are repeated and reinforced in other parts of the New Testament.

Live in harmony with one another

Don't pass judgement on one another

Forgive one another

Bear with one another.

Encourage one another.

The bed rock on which these are all based is of course the command to ...

love one another.

John 13:34 & 35 Jesus says ...

"A new command I give you: Love one another.

As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,
if you love one another."*

Note four obvious things in what Jesus says.

Firstly, it is a command

It is not an invitation. It is not an optional extra.

It is a command. It is a requirement of followers of Jesus that we love one another.

Secondly, note it's a vital part of evangelism

The love that is evident amongst followers of Jesus is the thing that marks them out distinctively as his followers.

Like the aroma of fresh bread just out of the oven, it is inviting and attractive and draws people to take notice and come and taste and see how good this is.

More than anything else, this is what is distinctive about followers of Jesus - that they love one another. This is what the world will notice.

Thirdly, it is something you do

Loving one another is an action. It is not words, kind thoughts or just an attitude of the heart. It is stuff you do with your hands.

Fourthly, the example Jesus gives is simple and practical

He takes a towel and basin and washes the disciples feet and says to them ... (verse 15)

I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

What struck me is that the example Jesus chose to give is something that every single one of us can do.

I would say that there is not a single person in this church tonight who could not do what Jesus did. It does not take special knowledge or expertise, or theological training, or bible knowledge, or fluency of speech, or acting ability, or musical skills – to wash feet.

It is completely within our capabilities. It is completely do-able.

Questions

This begs a number of questions.

If this is such a key part and fundamental tool in evangelism; and if this is so simple and easily achievable ...

... why is it necessary to make it a command?

... why was it not just happening spontaneously?

... why were the disciples not falling over each other to do this simple stuff of love one another in this simple practical way of washing feet?

Answer

I believe we have a hint of what the answer is in the verse 2.

The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.

There was a spiritual battle going on.

Judas had already determined to betray Jesus. His specific motive is not stated.

Possibly Judas realized that Jesus' enemies were hostile and that they were politically powerful, and he concluded that Jesus was bound to lose the struggle, and so decided that he might as well gain immunity from sharing Jesus' fate, and compensate himself by claiming the reward for betraying Jesus.

Possibly Judas was driven by the money and the thirty pieces of silver promised spoke to him and determined his motives and shaped his actions.

What ever it was the impulse is attributed to satanic suggestion.

This is not just a casual allusion to the devil. John is pointing to the fact that there is a deeper significance to the conflict than a mere political or theological squabble.

As John records the events of Jesus passion he points us to see that the conflict was basically actuated by a satanic rebellion against God, the

absolute opposite of the attitude of Jesus... he loved his disciples to the end ... or to the utter most.

What would make us believe that when it comes to loving one another that we are in any different position and immune from the wiles and strategies of the enemy?

With love and hospitality, practically demonstrated and lived out amongst Jesus followers being such an effective tool for evangelism, why would the enemy ignore it? Of course he is going to come against us as we try to follow Jesus example and show love for one another in practical serving ways.

He is going to use every trick in the book to knock us of course. And he is going to do it cleverly, without us realising what is going on. The enemy is clever and wily.

So what strategies will he use?

Well here are a number of common ones.

Laziness – just put it into their minds that it is just too much trouble. Make them feel tired. They have the energy to wash feet, but make them believe they don't.

Selfishness – that is good one. I don't want to do that. I won't enjoy it. Not part of my plan for today. This is not what I want to do today.

Pride – that always works. Let her do that. It is below me. He is the new boy on the block. I have done my bit. His turn now.

Blindness – just get them to not see what needs doing. Don't make them actually blind but effectively blind to the task that needs doing.

Distracted – put lots of other things in their way... things that look more important ... that are more urgent ... more glamorous.

Luke 10:41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and distracted by many things,..."

Selective - ... "It is not my issue." "I don't do feet washing." "I don't do the menial stuff ... I don't do carrying tables or serving at Alpha dinner, or washing up coffee cups, or serving meals, or giving lifts, I am preacher, I am worship leader".

The enemy will energise and use all those things to subtly keep us from loving one another in practical every day acts of service, to keep us from being effective in evangelism, keep us breaking Jesus' command and keep us in a place of living in rebellion.

Do not think that you are immune. Do not kid yourself that there is a spiritual battle going on and we are up against a wily enemy.

How do we fight this spiritual battle for community?

There were three things that were vital for Jesus in what he did as he set this example for his disciples.

Firstly, he knew the hour

Verse 1

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.

He knew the significance of the hour. He knew the importance of this meal. He knew opportunity that was before him.

How?

I believe that he asked God. I believe this was part of his every day conversation with the Father.

John 5:19

"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."

One way we can fight and win the battle for community is to be asking God that same question.

Father what is the hour?

Father, what is the significance of this moment?

What is happening right now?

Father, what is your agenda for this moment in these people?

Father what is happening in our family, in our house, in this office, in this staff room, right now?

If we stop and take a moment to ask God that question and wait for him to give us a reply he will.

That has been my growing experience in recent months.

We meet before this service every Sunday afternoon to pray and ask just that question. "Lord, what are you doing tonight? What is on your heart for the people who will be joining us for worship?"

And as we wait God gives us impressions, pictures, scriptures – he gives revelation, because he wants us to know the hour in the same way that Jesus did, because that makes us effective, that arms and strengthens us for the spiritual battle in which the enemy wants to keep us neutralised and distracted and blind to what God is doing.

And most often we don't need prophetic words and flashes of revelation. We just need to open our eyes.

There are a lot dirty feet here! (You just need a clear nose.)

There are lot of dirty cups here.

I wonder how the coffee, milk and sugar got here.

I wonder how this meal got cooked.

I saw her walking up the road, maybe she needs a lift home.

He is looking a bit awkward, I wonder if he is new and needs an invitation to the banana jam.

Some times God gives us prophetic revelation – a picture, word, a scripture – but very often all we need to do is open our eyes and say...

Lord, what is the hour?

What is happening right now?

What are you doing?

What do you want me to do?"

Secondly, Jesus knew who he was

Verse 3 ...

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.

If we know who we are then we can do the menial task because we know it is not defining us.

We can also do the daring thing without fear of failure, because we know that failure will not define us.

We can do the hidden thing that no one sees, because being seen is not what defines us.

We can do the humdrum everyday boring thing, because that will not define us as humdrum and boring.

If we are going to grow in being community, if we are going to grow in the ministry of hospitality, grow in obeying the command to love one another, it is vital that we know who we are.

It was vital for Jesus to know who he was and the Gospel narrative brings this out at strategic moments in life and his ministry.

As Jesus began his ministry it was vital that he knew who he was.

Matthew 3:16

¹⁶As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

The Holy Spirit came down on him to empower him and enable him to do the work he was called to do, and he was affirmed in his relationship with his heavenly Father.

"I am your Father - you are my child."

Just after this in the temptation in the desert the devil attacks Jesus on precisely this point. He attacked the knowledge of his sonship.

"If you are the Son of God - jump down from the pinnacle of the temple -- make these stones into bread."

If he could shake him there, then what ever his experiences might have been at his baptism, he would never be able to do any good in terms of his ministry.

As he faced suffering... when Jesus began to turn towards the cross he needed to know who he was.

As he was preparing to go towards Jerusalem and the cross he went up onto the Mount of Transfiguration with his disciples, and again the voice spoke,

"This is my son, whom I love."

And then again in the Garden of Gethsemane when he was up against the agony of the cross and the ready to go under the whole weight of the sins of the world, going apart a little way, he was able to say

"Abba, Father".

He could face suffering because he knew who he was

As he faced death ...

Jesus went down into that separation from God that sins brings with it.

"My God, my God why have you forsaken me?"

But then at the end he came back out of that and cried from the cross ...

"Father into your hands I commend my spirit",

He died knowing who he was. Knowing who he was enabled him to go out into the mystery of death with his identity in tack.

And knowing who he was enabled him to take on **the role of a menial servant**.

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.

And it is the work of the Holy Spirit to tell us who we are.

Galatians 4:6ff

⁶Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba,^o Father."⁷ So you are no longer slaves, but God's children; and since you are his children, he has made you also heirs.

That word Abba carries with it all the intimacy and security of a child held in the embrace of its father – protected, affirmed, comforted.

And it is God the Holy Spirit who puts that word onto our lips.

He has put that in our hearts

Has to keep tapping us on the head to get it down here.

Thirdly, Jesus knew where he was going.

*³Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power,
and that he had come from God and was returning to God;*

Jesus knew where he was going.

We need to know that too. If we work from the assumption that we this world is our home and that this where things begin and end we will be limited in the degree to which we can love one another and be hospitable and love in the way Jesus loved.

If we know that God has a welcome waiting for us in heaven when our time on this earth is over, if we know that this world is not our home, we will be able to give ourselves to love service of one another.

What do you need to know tonight?

The hour?

Who you are (or rather whose you are)?

Where you are going?

What has stopped you loving others as Jesus commanded?

How has the enemy prevented you obeying Jesus and being a rebel?

Recognise it, renounce it, repent, receive his forgiveness and replace rebellion with a willing obedient spirit.