
³³ "Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek Me. And as I said to the Jews, so now I tell you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'
³⁴ "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."
John 13:34-35

Remember when you were a kid and your mum or dad would say, "Now be nice to your brother or sister." And you might not say it but you were at least thinking, "Why? He isn't being nice to me. It isn't fair that I have to be kind to him when he's being mean to me."

As a believer in Christ, at times your Heavenly Father says the same thing to you, "Be nice to your brother or sister. . ." Our human tendency is to shout, "No! I don't want to! Even though he's a Christian, he isn't treating me nicely. It isn't fair that I have to be kind to him when he is being mean to me." Still your Heavenly Father says, "Be kind to one another." In fact, He goes o far as to say, "Love one another as I have loved you." And when you ask, "Why,?" He replies, "So others will see that you follow Me."

More than one significant Christian has stated that the love of Christ in the lives of believers is what sets them apart from the world. And we can conclude that the world has a right to judge the authenticity of Christ's claims to be the Messiah, the Saviour, the Son of God, by what they see in the lives of His followers. Was He the One who could change lives? Are the lives of His followers different than those of the world? Do they truly love one another in difficult times? We are called to a life of 'love'. But what does this love mean, as we consider Jesus' heart for us...?

Tonight from our text we consider this love from four angles.

First is the illustration of love.

Jesus 'got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.'

Washing feet before closed shoes, paved roads and proper sewerage drains.

This is Jesus' illustration of his love.

It's as if Jesus is saying, 'Let me give you a little picture of what my love is like. Let me act out a little parable of my love.'

And the picture is of a love which doesn't wait to be asked for help, but takes the initiative. A love which doesn't discriminate, but washes the beloved disciple and the traitor alike. (Notice, there's no reason to assume that he

doesn't wash the feet of Judas too). This 'love' does not excuse sin. But it loves the sinner...

It's a love which isn't afraid to get down into the dirt, but which shows itself in this humble and menial service.

So there is the illustration of love.

But then there is the resistance to love.

We can always rely on Peter to make things a bit more interesting.

'Lord, are you going to wash my feet? You will never wash my feet!'

What sort of resistance is this?

Partly it's just misunderstanding, but I think there's more going on here. It's one thing that Peter thinks this is beneath Jesus' dignity, but it's another that he, the disciple, feels the need to teach this to the teacher.

This is a resistance to love, you could say, which wants to be so humble, that it strangely risks becoming prideful.

Now when it comes to our life with Jesus, he says this is far more serious.

'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me'.

And so all of a sudden you get the feeling Jesus is talking about more than just foot washing, that he's not just concerned for hygiene, but for holiness.

And this is where we move from love resisted, to love revealed.

Love Revealed

Jesus says to Peter, 'You don't understand now, but later you will understand.'

Later, after what?

Later, after the cross.

This is where Jesus is heading. The love which is illustrated in the foot-washing is revealed in its completeness as Jesus gives his life as sacrifice.

Here on this night he humbles himself by kneeling down and washing feet, but on the next day he 'humbles himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.'

But this is where we can actually 'resist' God's love in Christ Jesus in an even deeper and more profound, and yet more important way – for it requires the admitting of one's own sinful nature.... Not the 'sin' of 'others', but one's own sin...

When Jesus says to Peter, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me', He is saying something like, 'Unless you receive the cleansing work I have come to bring through the forgiveness of sins won by my death on the cross, there's no fellowship with me.'

Jesus turns it upside down. And reveals to us how it's God who comes to wash you.

Then finally, there is the imitation of love.

'if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.' 'A new commandment I give you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.'

For Jesus' disciples, he shows the way, and we are called to imitate his love.

We are called to love one another in this way, which doesn't wait to be asked, but takes the first step.

To imitate this love means we aren't afraid of getting our hands dirty. This love doesn't talk of things being beneath our dignity. Because of the Christ's love for us, we are free to put ourselves in the place of a servant toward each other.

As we gather here this most holy night we remember, celebrate and participate in a most wonderful thing – God's love for us in Christ Jesus. We join in countless millions of Christians around in this most holy gift.

Jesus loved his disciples selflessly. Even in the noblest human love there remains some element of self. We so often think--maybe unconsciously--of what we are to get. We think of the happiness we will receive, or of the loneliness we will suffer if love fails or is denied. So often we are thinking: What will this love do for me? So often at the back of things it is our happiness that we are seeking. But Jesus never thought of himself. His one desire was to give himself and all he had for those he loved.

Jesus loved his disciples sacrificially. There was no limit to what his love would give or to where it would go. No demand that could be made upon it was too much. If love meant the Cross, Jesus was prepared to go there. Sometimes we make the mistake of thinking that love is meant to give us happiness. So in the end it does, but love may well bring pain and demand a cross.

Jesus loved his disciples understandingly. He knew his disciples through and through. We never really know people until we have lived with them. When we are meeting them only occasionally, we see them at their best. It is when we live with them that we find out their moods and their irritabilities and their weaknesses. Jesus had lived with his disciples day in and day out for many months and knew all that was to be known about them--and he still loved them. Sometimes we say that love is blind. That is not so, for the love that is blind can end in nothing but bleak and utter disillusionment. Real love is open-eyed. It loves, not what it imagines a man to be, but what he is. The heart of Jesus is big enough to love us as we are.

And Jesus loved his disciples forgivingly. Their leader was to deny him. They were all to forsake him in his hour of need. They never, in the days of his flesh, really understood him. They were blind and insensitive, slow to learn, and lacking in understanding. In the end they were craven cowards.

But Jesus held nothing against them; there was no failure which he could not forgive. The love which has not learned to forgive cannot do anything else but shrivel and die. We are poor creatures, and there is a kind of fate in things which makes us hurt most of all those who love us best. For that very reason all enduring love must be built on forgiveness, for without forgiveness it is bound to die.

When we refer to “God's love,” we're talking about the unselfish giving of Himself to us, which brings about blessing in our lives—no matter how unlovable we might be. That says something about the Lord's character. His love is not just an emotion, decision, or action—it's who He is.

There is truly good news in Jesus' call for us to 'love one another'... It is based on His word, “As I have loved you...” Jesus loves you. God does love you. On this holy night we remember God's journey to a cross – out of love for us, and all the people of the world. His love is an everlasting love. What a wonderful gift of life you have in Jesus. Let us live in love as we live in Him, now and into eternity. Amen.