Jesus gives you a new command: love each other, just as he loved you. Amen....

What? Did you expect more from this text? It is pretty simple, isn't it? Jesus loved us so much that he died for us. Now he wants us to love each other that same way. Do we really need to hear a whole sermon about that?

Well, let me put it this way: if you have ever held a grudge, thought you were better than someone else, thought that you gave more than others, were more educated, if you ever failed to greet someone because they made you angry, if you did not offer help, then you and I both need to be here, to explore this new command from our Lord and Savior. We need to examine just how he loved us so that we can love one another.

I remember reading about how during World War II, as a patrol boat was leaving Pearl Harbor, they found themselves on a collision course with an enormous aircraft carrier. After an emergency back down and a sigh of relief, those standing on the bow of the patrol boat watched the mammoth carrier pass by, less than 50 feet away. A patrol craft is only 100 feet long. As its crew looked up at aircraft carrier, they felt very insignificant. However, their pride was saved when one of their shipmates took a megaphone in hand and yelled: Our skipper can lick your skipper! Both sets of sailors were serving the same team, yet because of pride, one had to be better than the other.

That sounds just like the disciples. They were serving on the same team and yet one had to be better than the others. In our gospel for today we find Jesus and his disciples in the Upper Room on Maundy Thursday, the night before Jesus was crucified. After Jesus gave them the Lord’s Supper for the first time the disciples had a discussion about: Who among them was the greatest? Jesus had to set them straight.

And so the apostle Jn records these words for us: My children, I will be with you only a little longer. The Teacher uses a term of endearment: My dear children. And he informs his beloved children that he would be leaving them shortly, 42 days to be exact, and the Lord Jesus would ascend to heaven. If Jesus was going to commission these men to go to the corners of the world to share the message of his love, he needed to show them the correct attitude to have: A new command I give you. This was not really a new order. Back in the Old Testament the Lord told the people of Israel: Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord. This command was old, but Jesus put a fresh spin on it. The disciples had new motivation to love each other, a new model to follow: As I have loved you, Jesus said. They were to love each other in the light of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross for them, which he would accomplish in a few hours.

The model of love that Jesus promotes is so foreign to the world in which we live, especially here in America. We want to talk about ME. It is all about me: my time, my money, my house, my car, my Xbox, my TV, my puppy, my Lego’s, my dolls, and so on. This sinful attitude of pride and arrogance spills over into our relationships.

We do not always love each other as Christ loved us. We are selfish and conceited. We think of me first and you last. My time is precious so if it is convenient for me then I will love others. You do not have the education or rank I have, so I do not have time for you. You are not in the same tax bracket as me so I will ignore you. I have talents and skills you do not have. I will disrespect you. I will put you down. Wash your feet? Show love? I don’t
Children, when you do not listen and obey your parents, you do not love them as Christ loved you. Or when you disobey and talk back to your parents, you do not love them as Christ loved you. Parents, when you are excessively harsh with your children, you do not love as Christ loved you. Do you go to school? If you talk back to your teacher, make faces at them and say bad things about them, you do not love as Christ loved you. Husbands and wives, if you do not acknowledge the rolls that Christ has given you as helper and leader in the house, you do not love as Christ loved you. Employers, when you are uncaring and disrespectful to your employees or employees, when you anger your boss by your words and actions, you do not love as Christ loved you. What about your enemies? The Lord Jesus tells us: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. When was the last time any of us did that? Jesus says: You must love one another as I have loved you.

How did Christ love you? First of all we need to look at what kind of love Jesus showed us. In the original language of the New Testament there are many different words for love. There is love between friends, sexual love, love based on a need, and then there is agape love. This is the word Jesus uses here: Show agape love to each other as I have shown agape love for you. Agape love is love that sacrifices for others with no expectation of return. Look at how Jesus lived this kind of love. He raised the dead. He cured the terminally ill of their diseases. He cast out demons and blessed little children. He fed thousands. He associated with people of the lowest social class. He spent 3 years teaching men who had little or no formal education and he exercised great patience with them when they did not get it. He was just and fair, kind and honest. He was perfect in everything he said or did. He was not the kind of guy who ran out to his mailbox everyday to see if these people sent him a thank-you note.

But Jesus of Nazareth is much more than a good example. With his sinless life he was winning your redemption. He practiced agape love toward his mom and dad, toward his disciples and even toward his enemies. He prayed for them, called them to repentance, loved them even while they were putting him to death.

We know we fall far short of the love our Father wants us to have toward other people. Where we fall short, Jesus was perfect. And to make this life of love complete, Jesus lived his life for you. This also is foreign to our society. Sadly in our culture a woman thinks she has the right to choose to murder her unborn child, men and women think they have the right to live in same sex marriage, men and women think they have the right to live together outside of marriage, because after all, it is my life and my body. Jesus did not think that way. He said: I am going to live my life for you. His life of perfect love is your life of perfect love.

Jesus is much more than an example in his life and his death. Jesus would say to his disciples later that evening: Greater love has no one than this; that he lay down his life for his friends. Jesus practiced what he preached. Jesus went to his death and carried on his shoulders the sins of his disciples, the sins they would committed that very evening for not loving each other. He went to his death and carried in his wounds and bruises your sins of not loving each other. And he went willingly. He died because he loved you with agape love, love that sacrifices with no expectation of return. Even though he knew that you would not always love him and love your parents and your children and your employers with perfect love, Jesus loved you with perfect love, and putting that love into practice, he lived and died for you.
And then he gives this life and death to you free, as a gift! He does not say: **You need to earn this. You need to work for this.** No, Jesus’ life and death are free. It is a good thing it is free! How could we ever pay God back for our acts of selfish love, for our sinful attitude of pride and arrogance? We could never do that. But because the Father gives us his Son’s life and death free, your sins of vanity and self-righteousness are pardoned. Because the Father looks at his Son’s perfect life and complete sacrifice and resurrection from the dead as yours, he gives you all that Christ has - resurrection from the dead and eternal life in heaven.

The Father gives you these great gifts through another gift - faith. Faith is given freely through the gospel in Word and Sacrament. We have seen faith given to an infant through baptism. We have witnessed the Word of God create faith in an adult’s heart. Now, that faith receives Jesus’ love, his forgiveness, his gift of eternal life in heaven.

Faith has been shown and given love. Now it wants to show and give that love. There was a 78 year old woman in the Netherlands who had been smoking for 50 years. For 50 years she tried to give up her harmful habit, but she was not successful, that is, until recently. She has now given up her cigarettes. Her secret? A 79 year old man proposed marriage last year, but refused to go through with the wedding until she gave up smoking. Now the woman says: **Will power never was enough to get me off the tobacco habit. Love did it.**

Will power never was enough to get us off the pride and arrogance habit. Christ’s love did it. We love each other with agape love, self-sacrificing love, motivated by Christ’s agape love for us. We can never ever fully love anyone as Christ loved us, his love was so perfect. But now, as the disciples did, we love each other in light of Christ’s sacrificial love for us.

Now, as brothers and sisters, we will not put one another down but instead build one another up. We will not look down on others because they do not have the gifts or talents we have, instead we encourage them to use the skills the Holy Spirit has given them. Children, you will not talk back to your mom and dad. Instead, you will listen to what they say and do it gladly. Parents, you will not embitter your children and burden them, instead you will be firm and discipline them with love, patience and careful instruction. Husbands and wives, you will submit, love and respect each other – as Christ loved the Church. Employers and employees, you will value each other with respect and honor. Jesus says: **Love each other, just as I have loved you.**

So, did anyone time my sermon this morning? This sermon could have been less than 10 seconds long if I had simply said: **Jesus gives you a new command: love each other, just as he loved you.** It is that simple. But do you see why it is beneficial for us to explore how deep and wide and high and far is the love of Christ for me? It is so that I know I have fallen short of what God demands of me, but Jesus was perfect for me in my place – that is my motivation to love you better, and so that you can love each other. May you continue to keep Christ’s love before you as your motivation to love each other all the days of your life. To him alone be the glory. Amen.

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