

“Loving the Betrayer”

John 13:1-38 & 19:34, Zechariah 12:10 & 13:3
1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:3, 1 John 3:16

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April 28, 2013

Jesus gives the disciples and us a new commandment. “Love each other.” Love doesn’t sound like a new commandment. God is love. We were created in love, to love and for love. God has always desired for us to love and be loved. God smiles and rejoices over every instance of love, so how can Jesus give us a new commandment by telling us to love each other?

Perhaps you will discover the newness of this love by traveling back into the context of Jesus words. The disciples have spent three years with Jesus and they have witnessed God’s awesome love--forgiving, healing, renewing, feeding and baptizing thousands of people. Love. It is an awesome, grand, extravagant, miraculous love, yet gentle enough and personal enough to feel a lady touch the fringe of Jesus robe. Jesus stopped, listened, healed and empowered her. Boundary crossing love, that reached to shunned outsiders, a woman at a well. Teachings on the power of love that will unite, renew, and resurrect all people. There will be perplexing conversations of love that will save everyone through the cross.

Four days earlier they enjoyed Jesus triumphant entry into Jerusalem. They were all caught up in a joyous parade. The entire city was thrilled as they were preparing for the grand holiday of Passover. Family and friends united. There were even reunions, and days off from work and school. Everyone was talking about how Jesus compared God’s love to light which will disperse all darkness, and God’s booming voice from heaven declaring glory in Jesus. You are invited into a comfortable home. The smell of good wine and fresh bread welcomes you into an upper room with Jesus. John explains what happens next. **John 13:1-38 “Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. Jesus had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end. It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. So Jesus got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then Jesus began to wash the disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel he had around him. When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” Jesus replied, “You don’t understand now what I am doing, but someday you will.” “No,” Peter protested, “you will never ever wash my**

feet!” Jesus replied, “Unless I wash you, you won’t belong to me.” Simon Peter exclaimed, “Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!” Jesus replied, “A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not all of you.” For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what Jesus meant when he said, “Not all of you are clean.” After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, “Do you understand what I was doing? You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you are right, because that’s what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them. “I am not saying these things to all of you; I know the ones I have chosen. But this fulfills the Scripture that says, ‘The one who eats my food has turned against me.’ I tell you this beforehand, so that when it happens you will believe that I Am the Messiah. I tell you the truth, anyone who welcomes my messenger is welcoming me, and anyone who welcomes me is welcoming the Father who sent me.” Now Jesus was deeply troubled, and he exclaimed, “I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me!” The disciples looked at each other, wondering whom he could mean. The disciple Jesus loved was sitting next to Jesus at the table. Simon Peter motioned to him to ask, “Who’s he talking about?” So that disciple leaned over to Jesus and asked, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus responded, “It is the one to whom I give the bread I dip in the bowl.” And when he had dipped it, he gave it to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. When Judas had eaten the bread, Satan entered into him. Then Jesus told him, “Hurry and do what you’re going to do.” None of the others at the table knew what Jesus meant. Since Judas was their treasurer, some thought Jesus was telling him to go and pay for the food or to give some money to the poor. So Judas left at once, going out into the night. As soon as Judas left the room, Jesus said, “The time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory, and God will be glorified because of him. And since God receives glory because of the Son, God will soon give glory to the Son. Dear children, I will be with you only a little longer. And as I told the Jewish leaders, you will search for me, but you can’t come where I am going. So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.” Simon Peter asked, “Lord, where are you going?” And Jesus replied, “You can’t go with me now, but you will follow me later.” “But why can’t I come now, Lord?” Peter asked. “I’m ready to die for you.” Jesus answered, “Die for me? I tell you the truth, Peter—before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny three times that you even know me.”

The context reveals two aspects that make this love new. First, love for the betrayer. Second, love is the foundation to life.

Jesus loves those who betray him. All of us betray Jesus at times with our lifestyle and by our failure to love. All the disciples betrayed Jesus. The disciples fell asleep when Jesus really needed them. They failed to pray when Jesus specifically, urgently pleaded for their prayers. They abandoned Jesus. Peter denied Jesus. Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss. Yet Jesus loved all the disciples, all of his betrayers. Jesus washed each of their feet, served every one of them the Lord's Supper, and died to give resurrection and eternal life to all of them, even Judas.

The main difference between Peter and Judas was this radical new love for the betrayer. In time Peter came to forgive himself, to let go of the guilt of his denial of Jesus, and to love himself. Judas did not forgive himself. Judas was unable to love himself after his betrayal. I wonder if Judas would have left just a few minutes later after hearing Jesus commandment to love in this radical new way, and to love the betrayer. Would Judas have been a great lover, disciple and leader of the church? Jesus loves even betrayers. I believe Judas is enjoying the radiance of heaven.

All of the earlier commandments to love were easier. Love God. Love your neighbor. Love yourself. Love the stranger. Even loving your enemy is easier than loving your betrayers.

A betrayal is devastating. To betray is defined as: to lead astray, to fail or desert especially in time of need, to violate a confidence, to deliver to an enemy by treachery.

Betrayal by those we love is crushing. We make time to be with a spouse, child, family member or close friend. You pour love into them, sacrifice for them, build them up, trust them, believe in them and then they betray you. Jesus gives us a new commandment. Love the betrayer. Lay down your life for the one who has betrayed you.

It is the intimacy of Judas betrayal that is stunning. Judas is one of the chosen twelve, followed Jesus for three years and is the elected treasurer. If we exam the lives of the disciples we can find numerous ways each of them betrayed Jesus. It is so sad often the harshest words, the worst actions, the nastiest betrayals are done to those we love the most.

How have you been betrayed? How do you betray God, others, and yourself? Judas was unable to love self, to comprehend grace, to see new beginnings. Judas was overwhelmed by morality, rules, the law and by judgments.

How do you betray yourself? Perhaps with judgments, guilt, disrespect, negative self-talk. Often we are encouraged to betray ourselves. Advertisements tell us we are not good enough unless we have a certain product and have a great, fit body. Peer pressure tells us we are not good enough unless we get a certain grade, have a certain title, earn a certain amount of money, own a certain house, or win the championship. Each of us has a choice we can betray ourselves with jealousy, exhaustion from ceaseless striving, greed, blame, hate, fear, shame or we can love ourselves. Peter was angry at himself, guilt

ridden, devastated, crushed, embarrassed by his denial of Jesus so much so that Peter wept bitterly. The resurrected Jesus loved Peter. Jesus helped Peter forgive and love himself with this radical new love, to love the betrayer. You are commanded to love the betrayer of yourself.

The gospel of John explains. **John 19:34** “**One of the soldiers, however, pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, and immediately blood and water flowed out.**” Jesus loves the betrayer, even the soldier that killed him. The blood of sacrificial love poured out of Jesus. The cleansing water of baptism, grace, forgiveness, healing, resurrection flowed out of Jesus. This radical love was prophesied by Zechariah **Zechariah 12:10 & 13:3** “**Then God will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer...On that day a fountain will be opened...to cleanse them from all their sins and impurity.**”

Love for the betrayer is to be the primary witness of the church. Sadly a lot of betrayals happen at church. People see matters differently. People are not cared for when they are hurting. There are conflicts, harsh words, and hurt feelings, and on and on yet the primary aspect of the church is to be our love for each other, especially love for those who betray us, love for those who hurt us again and again, love for those who do not deserve love. Love is to be the foundation of our life. Love for the betrayer is more important than anything we believe, do or are. This was very radical when Jesus said it and it is still radical today. In Jesus day the foundation was striving to live a just life, to worship God, to follow tradition, the law, the teachings and commands of God. Many people still believe this is the essence of faith today, worshiping God, church traditions, right living, morality, being a good person, respecting others, stewardship, service, generosity. On the most critical night of Jesus waning life, Jesus tells the disciples not what they should believe, rather to love, to love the betrayers. Jesus washed the betrayers’ feet, served the betrayers the Lord’s Supper, died, rose and comes back to carry the betrayers home to God’s transforming grace and glorious eternal life.

The Apostle Paul put it this way. **1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:3** “**Let me show you a way of life that is best of all. If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn’t love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God’s secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn’t love others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn’t love others, I would have gained nothing.**”

Perhaps if Paul were writing today he would write. If I am a champion, have a big house, a new car and a retirement fund but don’t love I am nothing. If I donate large sums of money to church and charities but don’t love that person who wronged me I am nothing.

If I am an elder and deacon and worship every Sunday but don’t love an estranged family member I am nothing. If I know the customs and traditions of the church, have a finely

crafted statement of faith, read the bible, pray and meditate every day but don't love those who I am at odds with at church or anywhere I am nothing. If I am a great person, striving every moment to live every letter of the law and all of Jesus' teachings but don't love myself enough to forgive myself for the ways I betray myself, I am nothing. If I work for social justice, advocate for the poor, serve on boards of caring organizations, volunteer numerous hours in the community, love strangers, love even my enemies but don't love those who are betraying me I am nothing.

Love excludes no one. Love is far more than a feeling. Love is a daily choice, a priority, a decision, a commitment that we make anew every moment of our lives. We are commanded to choose again and again to love. Our love makes Jesus visible. Our love fills us with abundant joyful life. Our love glorifies God.

Pastor King Oehmig writes. "According to Jesus, the prime directive...[is] to love one another as Jesus loves us. The ongoing mission is the struggle, not to go into the far reaches of the galaxy, but rather to go deep within ourselves to hear the still, small voice, to go deep within ourselves to feel the strength of those everlasting arms; to go deep within ourselves to rise to meet the challenge to love when everything else in our society tells us to strike out in fear, when everything else in our society tells us to lash out in hatred or to release anger in a violent manner. Are we ready to boldly go where love calls?"

Ernesto Cardenal says "God's love is the water we drink, the air we breathe and the light we see." Scripture says. **1 John 3:16 "We know what real love is because Christ gave up his life for us. And so we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters."** Jesus loves us when we betray God, others and ourselves, like Judas. We are to love those who betray us. Amen