

'A NEW COMMANDMENT'

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How long would our lists be of 'things which seem so simple, so routine, so obvious, yet are not?': tasks at work, tasks around the house which turn into major undertakings with multiple steps which must be done in a certain order before the simple job we thought we were going to do, can be tackled.

Relationship issues, phobias. Things aren't always as we think they are: yes, we have an important role to play in how we interpret any given situation: its simplicity/its complexity, but there is still more to most jobs than meets the eye. We know we're getting poor advice when someone starts off with 'you just...'

This passage from John seems simple enough: this could have been the simplest & shortest message/sermon on record: Jesus said: 'love one another': so I could stop right here: we can all have a group hug, sing Kumbaya, say 'amen', & go home: but there is much to consider to gain a full & complete understanding of what Jesus was really doing & saying here, & why He found it necessary to say it at all.

Just before he spoke about a this new commandment, Jesus had served all his disciples: He had hosted them for dinner & given them & us an example by washing their feet: He literally reached out & down to them. He had been in the middle of dinner with his disciples, including Judas who would betray him: common knowledge to Jesus: (how would we feel?: someone at your table & you know what they're about to do: someone you have spent 3 years with is about to throw you under the bus: dinner as usual?): yet our Lord didn't find a way to get rid of Judas before the meal: it would have been understandable, to us, at least: the atmosphere in Jesus' mind was 'cloudy' 'dark' 'poisoned': verse 21 says: He was troubled in spirit & said 'one of you will betray me'. One of you who has travelled & eaten with me. Someone whom I've worked closely with; someone I've taught & ministered to. We know that Jesus identified Judas by dipping a

piece of bread & giving it to him. One commentator stated: it was the custom that 'the host at a feast would dip a tasty bit into a common bowl & pass it to a guest as a special mark of honour or friendship: because Jesus passed it so easily to Judas, it could be assumed that they were seated near each other: that Judas occupied a place of honour'. Think how some today are ready to attack someone instantly because they cut us off on the road, or cut into a line, or walked on our grass...Jesus told him to go & do what he had to do.

So Judas then left & Jesus began giving his final instructions, his 'famous last words', his new commandment to his disciples, & by extension to us.

How do we react to someone's 'two cents worth'? I'm leaving: but not before I mention a few things': & we think 'oh here we go'. Jesus knew they would listen & make every effort to follow his directions & example: but why say anything at all? They had lived the message for 3 years: God is love: the Father is in me, Jesus said. The disciples had just spent 3 years watching Jesus love, serve, teach, & forgive others: so why say anything except 'carry on' or 'look after the place. But something had to be said, because it was & is vital to living in the completeness of Jesus: to be, as was stated last week: spiritual people having an earthly experience & not the other way around. To be in the world but not of the world. To carry on like Jesus means all jobs, all roads, all people: not just the pleasant & easy ones: we can't pray 'May thy will be done', with conditions.

So they receive their order: their new commandment: let's think about that for Bible times & our times: the 'Commandments': God's plan for successful living; God's plan for a complete relationship with Him: were given to Moses who was called up Mount Sinai by God himself: scripture says the commandments were written by the finger of God: follow them & your life is in complete sync & harmony with our God: our creator; our sustainer.

Then, as now we are not good order takers. Any comment that even smacks of 'orders' or even strong advice, get's us on the defensive: but it seems so easy to live every day following God's plan: 10 orders: not 3 binders full of 'Policies & Procedures': from God himself: the one we are to trust completely. So imagine the reaction when Jesus (the carpenter's son) uses the word 'commandment': we

already know from Scripture that the chief priests said about Jesus: 'who is this, that he forgives sins?' & now he is issuing a new commandment: but Jesus had said: 'you have seen me, you have seen the Father: the Father is in me & I am in the Father'. The commandment, the order to them & to us seems simple enough: 'love one another as I have loved you': a tall, but important order: because the love Jesus was talking about was a total & sacrificial love; an unconditional love: Agape: while we were yet sinners, Christ died: not 'Easter is in two weeks, so get your act together or I'm not doing this': or 'I'm doing this for my disciples & family': and many needed & need to 'get their act together': but it doesn't matter: we are to love totally & unconditionally, serve selflessly, & forgive: to 'let it go': no I'm not going to sing.

This is total, all the way, sacrificial love: not Hallmark card love.

It's easy to do all this with people who like us; who are like us: it's not as easy to do this with people who have falsely accused us, beaten us, humiliated us, spit on us, mocked us publicly, lied to us & about us: you get the Easter picture: precisely why we are to be Easter people.

A great way of understanding this new commandment is to think of someone in the past or present that we love: that we would do anything for; at any time of the day or night; no matter what the financial or emotional cost: & then think of someone we can't stand: someone from the above-mentioned group: Jesus says: 'them too, the same way', because that's what I did for you.

Whether it's leaving our comfort zone by serving in a soup kitchen, a food bank, a burn unit in South America, building houses & schools in Africa: this is our new commandment. Whether it's Mother Teresa ministering to the poor in India, many of whom she also 'cleaned up/washed' because they were covered in filth, from the streets & themselves; whether it's Pope John-Paul 2nd who forgave his would-be assassin, even as he was being rushed to the hospital in critical condition & not knowing whether he would live or die. Doesn't get much worse than someone trying to kill you with a gun: doesn't get much better when they are instantly forgiven.

Jesus said on the cross: 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do': He said this because without his love & forgiveness they wouldn't ever have a chance to 'know what they do'. The people God has placed in our lives (especially those we find extremely hard to take; those who aren't like us & perhaps don't like us: as if that's necessarily a bad thing), won't either: they will never get the chance to know 'what they do' unless we do likewise: unless they meet Christ through us: the thought & message from the bracelets some may still have, is still good to keep in mind in all our situations & interactions: 'What would Jesus do?'

'A new commandment I give unto you: that you love one another:

As I have loved you.'

Amen.