

**Maundy Thursday**  
**John 13:1-15, 34-35**

*A new commandment I give to you, our Lord Jesus said, as we hear it tonight, on that night in which He was betrayed: that you love one another.*

These are sweet words, and the world loves words such as these, about loving one another. If there is something almost everybody can embrace, it is the idea that we should all love one another. Even those who actually believe in hatred and promote hatred, even they love the idea of us all loving each other; that is why they are so desperate to convince themselves that their hatred for all who do not believe what they themselves believe is somehow an expression of *love*. Love is good, and everybody wants to be good. Therefore, I have to believe that the people I hate are evil, anybody who disagrees with me about anything; and when I support the destruction of other people's businesses and property and professional life, and their life altogether, I have to call it *love* to convince myself that I am good, and to feel good about the obvious evil I do.

Particularly popular is the idea that this is what being *Christian* is all about: loving others, nothing else; not about believing in Christ, nor in believing what He teaches. In reality, though, what those who think that way about being a Christian mostly mean by this is that being a Christian means to love that which *I* love, and those who believe what I believe. For, again, those who believe in something other than what I believe, like those who believe that being a Christian is about believing in Christ and what He teaches in Holy Scripture, they are *evil*, and therefore it is good and right and Christian to hate them.

There are those, also, who call themselves Christian, who do not go quite that far; nevertheless, they do believe that being a Christian is about loving each other rather than about believing in Christ. And for them the words are sweet, also, which we also hear tonight that our Lord Jesus spoke in that bitter last night: *By this all will know that you are my disciples: if you have love for one another.*

Some who call themselves Christian claim that the way to convince the world to become Christian is not to proclaim Christ and His love; rather, it is to have love for one another; and this, they say, means to not care what is true, but to worship together, instead, all of us, regardless of what we believe, and in whom.

It would seem, perhaps, that this is what our Lord Jesus teaches with the words we hear tonight that He spoke in this bitter last night, would it not?

Except that our Lord Jesus has much more to say, and had much more to say, also, in that bitter last night, than a *new commandment I give to you, that you love one another*, and that *by this all will know that you are my disciples: if you have love for one another*.

As we hear it tonight, our Lord Jesus also said that His new commandment is this: *as I have loved you, that you also love one another*. In other words, the love of which He speaks is His own love; as we also hear it tonight: *as He had loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end*. It is the love of which He had previously spoken: *I am the Good Shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep*.

His love is that which was from eternity *in God*, between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; the love out of which He made us to begin with, in order for us to be there for Him to love, and have all things good given to us out of His goodness. It is the love from which our first parents turned away, to seek goodness and good on their own, their own way, apart from God and His love. It is the love from which we all have turned away to seek our own instead, and the love of this world. And it is the love out of which the Son of God came to us to lay down His life for us.

It was of this His own love our Lord Jesus spoke in this the bitter last night, when all was about to be brought to completion. *As He had loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end*. And later in that night, He would have Himself given over into the hands of His enemies, given over to sufferings and death, to die upon a cross, cursed and condemned by God.

Such is His love for us sinners, who would not know of His love, that He would suffer and die for us and bear His own judgement for us, in our stead and on our behalf, against our ungodliness and evil, that we turn away from His love to seek our own instead, and the love of this world.

This is the love of which the world will not know, nor will we ourselves, not with that in us which is of this world. We cannot and will not by ourselves accept that He who is God Himself from eternity should serve us and save us in such shame and sufferings.

On that bitter last night He gave His disciples a sign of His salvation: He performed the task of the most lowly servant, in that He knelt down to wash His disciples' feet.

The Apostle John remembered this, and relates this, as he remembered and relates so many other underhanded ways in which our Lord Jesus would teach about His Baptism, and about the festive meal of salvation, which He instituted in that very night. And he also relates how Peter could not have that: *Never shall you wash my feet!*

It dwells deeply in our nature not to allow our Lord Jesus to serve us in His love, and save us by His shame and humiliation; that we should be serving Him, instead, by our own goodness and godliness, and more than that: that by doing good we can and must make ourselves right with God; by loving others, at least those who are loveable.

*If I do not wash you, our Lord Jesus replied, you have no part with me. For God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all, as He has also had His holy Apostle John write it. God cannot and will not have evil in His presence. Only cleansed from any and all impurity can we serve Him, or have anything to do with Him to begin with. And we are cleansed from all sin and impurity in His Baptism. He who is Himself without sin had Himself baptised with sinners to make Himself one with us and take our sin upon Himself and bear it for us, and His judgement against it, and have us baptised and made one with Him in all that He is and all that is His. Him who knew of no sin God made to be sin for us, as the holy Apostle Paul has written it, so that in Him we might become to righteousness of God.*

And baptised into Him, we are cleansed in His blood. *The blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanses us from all sin, as He has also had His holy Apostle John write it.*

*He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean, we also hear tonight that He said; and you are clean, though not all of you.* This is yet another underhanded way in which the Gospel according to Saint John remembers and recounts how our Lord Jesus would teach both about His Baptism and about His festive meal of salvation, which He instituted in that bitter last night.

Baptised into Him, sinners are completely cleansed from sin and guilt; we are clothed in His righteousness, whole and complete as it is, so that we are right with God and righteous before His judgement, and we need nothing more to be that. His festive meal of salvation is for *maintenance*, so to speak, as if to wash the dust picked up along the way off our feet; it maintains and renews the salvation that is already ours, fully and for real. It is given to us as a joyful celebration of our salvation, rather than as cause for concern, if we miss out on it too often.

Therefore is it that it is futile to fear for the fate of those who have for one reason or another not been able to receive the Sacrament for a while; such as those who have fallen into the darkness of dementia.

The salvation our Lord Jesus has won for us is full and complete, with nothing lacking, nothing left for us to do; it is given, really given, with His promise, to all who do not reject Him.

Therefore, also, is it equally futile to fear for the fate of those who believed in Him, but for one reason or another died before they made it to actually be baptised. As our Lord Jesus had also said it previously: *Already you are clean because of the Word that I have spoken to you.*

With His Word of His love and what His love has done for us He declares us to be His own, free from sin and guilt; and since He is Himself the one who shall come in glory to judge the living and the dead, and since He has won for Himself the right to declare whomever He will free from guilt and debt, and from death and damnation, what He says goes; what He says we are before His judgement, that we are! Although He did say that *you are clean, though not all of you;* because there was one among them whose heart His Word of salvation did not reach, one who would die in unbelief.

What our Lord Jesus would have us learn tonight is what He has also had His holy Apostle John write, that *this is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you: that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we are in communion with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not do the Truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have communion with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.* The love of which He spoke in that bitter last night is His own love. His command, that *as I have loved you, so you also love one another,* it is not a common command to be generally nice and polite; it reflects what He also said in that bitter last night: *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love.* It refers to the love with which He knows His own, and His own know Him, the love with which the Father knew the Son from eternity, and He the Father, that He laid down His life for the sheep. It is a call to live under His love, in His Word and worship, in which He constantly gives Himself to His Church anew, and to His Christians, and the salvation He has already given to us, once and for all, and fully and for real.

O Christ our God, Lamb of God, who have borne, and take away, the sin of the world, have mercy upon us. Amen.