

**“A New Commandment”**

John 13:31-35

May 6, 2007 – The Fifth Sunday of Easter C

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

John 13:31-35

When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Prayer.

It was in the Upper Room.  
The night before Jesus was murdered.  
Jesus knew his time was short.  
John records the fact  
that Jesus washed his disciples feet.  
He announced that one would deny him.  
One would betray him.  
“I am with you only a little longer.”  
Indeed, Judas had already  
slipped out the back,  
gone for the soldiers.  
“Where I am going,  
you cannot come.”  
There would not have been  
any apostolic mission  
had they all joined Jesus  
crucified on a cross that day.  
All of Jesus' life  
came down to these last moments,  
summed up in these final words.  
“I give you a new commandment,”  
Jesus tells them,  
“that you love one another.”

Philia

Ah, love.

So amazing, so divine.

It is discovered and experienced  
in childhood;  
that dispassionate virtuous love  
that exists around the supper table,  
that loyal of friendship  
which takes root  
in elementary school  
or during recess,  
that enjoyment of an activity  
or sharing mutual interests  
amongst friends.  
Friends forever!  
Friends for life!  
This love Aristotle recognized  
is known as  
“philia” in the Greek.

I give you a new commandment,  
that you love one another.  
Thus, Jesus wants us to all be friends  
to get along  
to have an absence of infighting  
division or strife.  
Jesus wants us,  
his disciples,  
to be loyal and true  
to one another  
and to Him.  
One can make the argument

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that Jesus seeks Christian unity,  
the restoration of one church  
with his command to love.

Eros

Just saying the word “eros”  
probably takes the imagination  
of half the adults  
and all the adolescents  
to someplace other than church!  
Oh, eros-  
that first time in third grade  
when a note was passed  
revealing the hidden love  
one has for another.  
The smile,  
the blush,  
the thought,  
“yes, I can do this”  
followed by a return note  
of childhood eros.  
In adolescence and young adulthood,  
eros is all about passion,  
longing desire  
that can only be fulfilled  
with romance.  
Unfortunately, some  
never move beyond  
raw passion or lust,  
never discover that eros  
can mean so much more.  
Four hundred years before Jesus,  
Plato taught that eros  
when advanced with contemplation;  
it becomes an appreciation  
of the beauty within,  
even an appreciation of beauty itself,  
and contributes to an understanding  
of spiritual truth.

I give you a new commandment,  
that you love one another.  
With the same passion  
and appreciation,  
is it possible for disciples

of Christ  
to love one another  
- eros -  
while maintaining  
celibacy in singleness  
and fidelity in marriage?  
Yes, I would suggest.  
It is possible to admire  
the depth of faith  
a fellow disciple of Christ  
might exhibit.  
It is possible to appreciate  
the beauty within another  
that only comes with  
a commitment of faith  
and putting words into actions.  
Yes, it is possible to have  
an eros relationship  
with others  
and with Christ  
while being true to  
God's law  
and marriage vows.

Agape

Alpha, gamma, alpha, pi, alpha, tau, epsilon  
is the exact spelling,  
flowing like ink  
from the point of John's pen  
in verse 34 of this 13<sup>th</sup> chapter.  
“I give you a new commandment,  
that you love one another.”  
To love  
or long for,  
to take pleasure,  
benevolence,  
beloved,  
warm, instinctive affection.<sup>1</sup>  
Jesus tells us to have a general affection  
for one another,

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1 Berry, G.R., Interlinear Greek-English New  
Testament King James Version, Baker Book House,  
Grand Rapids, MI, 1987, p.288 and p.1 of the Greek-  
English New Testament Lexicon.

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good feelings,  
holding one another in high esteem.  
Agape implies  
self-sacrifice;  
that is,  
going further  
giving more  
responding above and beyond expectations  
simply because  
this is the posture Jesus wants us to take.  
Agape implies  
loving the unlovable;  
yes, even those who irritate  
those who make us want to turn with disgust  
even those who  
have made us  
their sworn enemy.

At the height of Jesus teachings,  
perhaps in his most desperate attempt  
to simplify  
and come to a point,  
Jesus commands us to love  
with agape;  
to love him  
to love one another  
and to love beyond the circle of disciples.  
Because Jesus is so clear,  
so concise,  
I have learned to always  
be suspicious of  
people who call themselves Christ followers,  
on the one hand,  
and call for fellow disciples  
to hate,  
to hurt, or to kill,  
on the other.  
Words that call for  
arming ourselves for the inevitable  
apocalyptic shoot-out  
are probably not the words  
of Jesus.

Christianity is a religion of agape,  
a community who

are defined by people following  
the ways and example of Jesus Christ.  
It is a following religion,  
(which makes me cringe every time  
I see a Christian leadership workshop  
come down the pike!),  
in which we only have one leader,  
Jesus Christ.  
He tells us to live our lives  
full of agape;  
so much agape,  
in fact,  
that everyone will know that we are his  
disciples  
by our love for one another.

The communion table,  
around which we will gather this morning,  
is all about this same agape  
that we are to have for one another  
and for our Lord.  
You can't share  
bread and drink  
with those you hold enmity,  
those you hate,  
or those you consider enemies.  
The bread and cup extend beyond these  
four walls.  
Eucharist is celebrated as Mass with  
some of our brothers and sisters.  
It is celebrated as communion with others.  
Bread is broken by chaplains in Iraq  
and chaplains on college campuses.  
The fruit of the vine is shared  
in the East and in the West,  
up North and down South of the border.  
Taking the bread and drinking the cup  
unites us in love  
far beyond that which is celebrated today.  
It is also a communion with the Saints,  
those who have gone on before us,  
a communion of love,  
that goes all the way back  
to Jesus in that fear-filled Upper Room.

Come Monday morning  
will others see the agape in your life?  
Will they know that  
you are a transformed man or woman,  
who spreads love where ever you go  
and in what ever you do?  
Will they know that you follow Jesus  
by your love?

“I give you a new commandment,  
that you love one another.”  
Philia, eros, and agape  
all rolled into one.  
“Just as I have loved you,  
you also should love one another.  
By this everyone will know that  
you are my disciples,  
if you have love for one another.”<sup>2</sup>

The Word of the Lord. Amen.

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2 John 13:35, The New Revised Standard Version of  
the Bible, 1989.