

John 13:12-17, 33-35  
1 Corinthians 11:23-26

#### THE MODEL OF LOVE

Dr. Robert L. Allen tells the story of a small boy, who was being raised in a frontier city by his grandmother. One night the house caught on fire. The grandmother tried to rescue the boy who was asleep in the bedroom upstairs; however, she was overcome by smoke and died. A crowd gathered around the house and they heard the small boy crying out for help. The lower floor was a wall of flames and no one seemed to know what to do. Suddenly, a man pushed through the crowd and began climbing an iron drainage pipe, which ran to the roof. The pipe was hot from the fire, but he made it to a second floor window. He crawled through the window, located the boy, and then climbed down the hot iron pipe with the boy on his back and holding on to his neck.

A few weeks later, a public meeting was held to determine in whose custody the boy would be placed. Each person wanting the child would be allowed to make a brief statement. The first man said, I have a farm and would give the boy a good home. He would grow up on the farm and learn a trade. The second person to speak was the local schoolteacher. She said, I am a school teacher and I would see to it that he received a good education. Finally, the town banker said, Mrs. Morton and I would be able to give the boy a fine home and a fine education. We would like him to come and live with us. The presiding officer looked around and asked, Is there anyone else who would like to say anything? From the back row, a man rose and said, These other people may be able to offer some things I cant. All I can offer is my love. Then, he slowly removed his hands from his coat pockets. A gasp went up from the crowd because his hands were scarred terribly from climbing up and down the hot pipe. The boy recognized the man as the one who had saved his life and ran into his waiting arms.

The farmer, teacher, and the banker simply sat down. Everyone knew what the decision would be. The scarred hands proved that this man was interested in the boy. The scarred hands spoke of his love for the boy. (His Finest Days, pp. 40-41) This story, with its emphasis on self-giving love, serves to introduce the scripture lesson from Johns Gospel. Earlier in the thirteenth chapter, Jesus had taken on the role of a servant; he had poured water in a basin and proceeded to wash his disciples feet the one who would soon betray him, the one who would deny knowing him three times, and the ten other disciples who would run away from him.

With towel in hand, Jesus wiped their feet, and then, seizing the opportunity, he instructed them to follow his lead and relate to one another in similar fashion. If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one anothers feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. Jesus was all about leading by example, and he expects his disciples in every age to follow the leader, to go and do likewise. Jesus disciples are servants, who serve one another; and, if they do not, if they seek to serve only themselves, then they are really not his disciples!

To drive this point home even further, Jesus launched into his farewell discourse. After all, the end was near for, shortly after this initial instruction, Judas slipped out into the night to set in motion the events which would lead to Jesus arrest, suffering, and crucifixion. Jesus sought to prepare his eleven disciples for what would soon take place. And, in doing so, he shared

with them a summary of all his teachings and he expressed to them both his dying command and their marching orders for all time. He told them that he was with them only a little longer so listen up! I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. As with the foot washing and serving one another, Jesus didnt ask his disciples to do anything he didnt or wouldnt do. Jesus loved these men with whom he had shared life and ministry for the past several years; and now, he ordered them to continue to love one another. Its important to note several items. Jesus didnt ask them to love one another. He commanded them to do so no ifs, ands, or buts just do it!

Its from this new commandment (what some have referred to as the eleventh commandment), that we get the word Maundy for Maundy Thursday of Holy Week. While the commandment to love one another is found all the way back in the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:18), what makes it so new in this context is the motivational clause attached to it: Love one another as I have loved you. Jesus is the model of love, and, if we are planning to follow him, then we must love like he loves, without exception to the rule! This commandment is new because no one has ever loved us the way Jesus loved us. Therefore, we love because he first loved us.

I read a quote by Leonard Sweet, who said most people assume Jesus came teaching the Golden Rule which is Do unto others as you would have others to do unto you. And who, asks Sweet, is at the center of that commandment? You are, he says. Actually Jesus came overthrowing the Golden Rule. Jesus teaches the Platinum Rule: Do unto others as I have done unto you. Jesus commands a love for one another that springs out of his love for us. (Biblical Preaching Journal, Spring 1998, p. 15) Heres another thing to note about Jesus new commandment to love one another: hes not talking about a sentimental feeling but a particular way of acting or behaving. Love is something you do for someone else. This is no romantic love or simply being nice and kind to another person. Rather, it is a fierce and active love that gives of ones self for the sake of others even to the point of death. It is a self-giving and life-giving kind of love that Jesus has modeled for us, and nothing less! It is a love that is realized in concrete actions; this love reaches out to accept all others, to forgive others, and to work for the welfare of all. Jesus love, working in and through us, is to be the distinguishing mark of followers of Jesus Christ.

Also, Jesus offers us the same spirit that empowered him to live and love. He can reproduce his ability to love others even those who would crucify him in us. When we love one another in this way, our actions become signs of Jesus life in us. Keeping this commandment is the tangible sign of abiding in Jesus and of his abiding in us. Jesus himself went on to say, By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Heres what Jesus new commandment to love one another looks like in action.

Comedian Jerry Clower tells a story about two Christian businessmen, who were having lunch in a restaurant. The waitress serving their table dumped a bowl of hot soup right over one of these businessmen. Everybody gasped and stared. As Clower tells it, They couldnt wait for the manager to run out and fire the lady. They just couldnt wait for this man, standing there, dripping, with his suit ruined, to cuss this waitress out, but the fellow looked at that waitress and said, Young lady, Im so sorry this happened to you. I know it embarrasses you. (Life Ever Laughter) Thats the kind of love that Jesus modeled and now commands us to do.

Before I close, I want to lift up one other feature. Jesus command to love one another was set in the context of the new covenant that Jesus established with the broken bread symbolizing his broken body and the cup noting his blood shed for the sins of many. Here, and then on the very next day of his crucifixion and death, Jesus modeled self-giving and life-giving love for all the rest of us. Remember the opening story about the man, who showed his terribly, scarred hands (from climbing up and down the hot pipe) and, in doing so, he revealed his deep love for the small child he had saved from the fire? Even more, let us never forget and forever love and follow Jesus, who, by merely raising his hands, reminds us of his claim upon us. Those hands were scarred by nails. There can be no doubt that he loves us. And, without a doubt, he expects us to continue in his love by loving one another.

The pathway from here to there leads us to the Table of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Let us come and sup with him, and one another. Let us be nourished, filled, and replenished with these sacred symbols of his sacrificial love for us. Then, let us go forth to act on his love. Let us keep this commandment to love one another not so much because we have to but because we want to do so out of grateful response to him who loves us first and forever. The sacrificial love of Jesus Christ calls forth our ability to love others, which, in turn, brings glory to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Randall C. Stevens  
First Presbyterian Church/Martinsville, VA  
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