

Maundy Thursday

COMMANDED TO LOVE

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Maundy Thursday

Analysis by Bruce T. Martin

13:1 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper 3Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, 4got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 5Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. 6He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7Jesus answered, "You do not know what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." 9Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 10Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you [pl] are clean, though not all of you [pl]." 11For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." 12After he had washed his feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13You call me Teacher and Lord-and you are right, for that is what I am. 14So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

15For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. 16Very truly, I tell you, servants are not above their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. 17If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. . . .31bNow the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33Little 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.' 34I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

DIAGNOSIS: Unable to Love

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Reduced Love*

On Maundy Thursday we remember the "new commandment" (v. 34, in Latin *mandatum novus*) that liturgically has come to mean either washing one another's feet as an "example" of love (v. 15) or celebrating the Eucharist (in the synoptics, "Do this"), or both. Rarely, however, do we remember the command behind the commandment: "that you love one another just as I have loved you" (v. 34). Typically, we reduce the command to love to a mere "example," as if thereby we are fulfilling the "new commandment." So completely overwhelmed are we by Jesus' new commandment that we substitute old-style doable commandments in its stead. [The Greek word *entole* can be translated either as "command" or "commandment." The distinction made here is between what is "new" (v. 34) about Jesus' or the Father's *entole* as opposed to all other kinds of *entole*. This verbal distinction is unique to John in the NT and justifies its non-technical usage

here. The theological distinction, however, is found throughout the NT.]

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Love without Trust*

Fulfilling the “new commandment” by example disregards love’s comprehensive scope: “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (v. 1, in Greek telos, “completely,” “to the utmost”). Ineluctably, we find that such love is impossible for us, even partially. Our meager examples of love simply do not match the love by which Jesus loved us completely, to the utmost. For, unlike Jesus, our reduced-love does not rest on that trust-in-God new entole by which Jesus loved us “to the end.” For us, the command to love is inevitably reduced to the old commandments and their threats. Without trust in God’s love for us, love for one another is simply impossible (see 1 John 3:23-24).

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Love without God*

Without a Jesus-like, trust-in-God, new entole, we do not have a God like Jesus’ Father, and the deadly threats inherent in the old commandments remain. Like Judas’ love (v. 2), reduced love results in a betrayal of Jesus and a decided mistrust of Jesus’ Father. All would-be disciples inevitably become Judas—not merely like Judas. In not trusting God’s love for us in Jesus, we do not have the Father as our God. We prove ourselves, then, to be not only loveless and faithless but Godless; that is, without love for one another, without trust in God, without the mercy of God. We are as damned as the devil, period. No exit.

PROGNOSIS: The Loving Christ

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *The Love of God in Christ*

“Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them completely” (v. 1). Jesus’ death on the cross was the

culmination of his life of love (see 13:31; 15:12; 19:30; compare Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus*). Everything that Jesus did exemplified a life of absolute trust in God; this is the kingdom of God. This new entole extends from the Father to the Son, in whose flesh was received the totality of our own lovelessness, our own unbelief, our own condemnation (1:9-18; 3:16-21; 5:19-47), leading to Jesus' death and resurrection; this is God's glorification (v. 31). Jesus seals the Father's "new commandment" of love and mercy for the world, which continues forever through Jesus' resurrected life in the Holy Spirit; this is our salvation.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Abiding in God's Love*

In John's theological lexicon, faith and love, together with life, knowing, and seeing "abide" in Jesus whose new entole is "given" to us ("gifted" to us, v. 34). All this is a new work of God in the Holy Spirit: a command ("to love") that makes possible the "keeping" of every commandment (6:28-29; 14:15-17). Just as there is no humanly knowable reason for God's decision to love us, so also there is no discernible reason to associate God's love for us with our love for God. Faith in Christ cannot be reduced or separated from God's new creativity; it simply "abides" in God.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Loving One Another*
Consequently, God's new entole, love itself, extends also through us to one another, "testifying" to God in Christ rather than to ourselves (v. 35; 13:20; 15:1-17). Indeed, we expect to receive in our bodies of faith exactly what Jesus received, the "hatred" of the world (15:18-19); this, too, is for the glory of God. Because our love for one another is always Christ's love, it is never backward looking: "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (16:33; see 21:22).