

A New Commandment

(Sermon by Rev. John Dieterly, May 2, 2010)

Revelation 21:1-7 (TEV) ¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth disappeared, and the sea vanished. ²And I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared and ready, like a bride dressed to meet her husband. ³I heard a loud voice speaking from the throne: “Now God’s home is with people! He will live with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. ⁴He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared.”

⁵Then the one who sits on the throne said, “And now I make all things new!” He also said to me, “Write this, because these words are true and can be trusted.” ⁶And he said, “It is done! I am the first and the last, the beginning and the end. To anyone who is thirsty I will give the right to drink from the spring of the water of life without paying for it. ⁷Those who win the victory will receive this from me: I will be their God, and they will be my children.

John 13:31-35 (TEV) ³¹After Judas had left, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man’s glory is revealed; now God’s glory is revealed through him. ³²And if God’s glory is revealed through him, then God will reveal the glory of the Son of Man in himself, and he will do so at once. ³³My children, I shall not be with you very much longer. You will look for me; but I tell you now what I told the Jewish authorities, ‘You cannot go where I am going.’ ³⁴And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples.”

A story is told about a young, very successful stock broker, who may have been working for Goldman Sachs, who was proud, very proud, to drive to work one morning, and park his beautiful, very expensive new Jaguar right in front of his office, right there on Wall Street in New York City. Just as he opened his door to step out, a New York City Cab went flying by and tore the door right off, carrying it away to who knows where. Crushed, furious, irate, in shock, our successful young broker called the police on his cell phone, and within seconds two officers appeared. Our man immediately went into a tearful tirade, how this beautiful symbol of his success, his new Jaguar had been so terribly damaged by a cabbie who didn’t even remain on the scene.

The one police officer, with deep disdain in his voice, responded, “This is just the problem with you finance guys. You are so upset about your fancy new car that you probably haven’t even noticed that when the door was torn off your car, your left arm was torn right out of the socket, and must have been carried away with your car door.

Our stock broker looked down where his left arm should have been and exclaimed, “Oh no, where’s my new Rolex watch?”

I am sure you all know the story of the teacher of the law who asked Jesus, “What is the greatest commandment?” You may recall the answer Jesus gave, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” The first part is clear – Love God with everything you have, but the second part is flawed, because some people just don’t love themselves very much. Our stockbroker in the opening story didn’t love himself very much – he loved his possessions, his status symbols, his things, more than he loved himself.

Do you think Jesus knew that this old commandment had this flaw? Of course it is not a flaw in the commandment, but a flaw in our human behavior. We all have those moments when we don’t love ourselves. And so on the night he was betrayed, just after he had identified Judas as the betrayer, and

after Judas had walked out of the room, Jesus gave a new commandment. Well, in a sense it wasn't new, but there was a new **standard** that basically redefined the greatest commandment. Jesus still taught, love your neighbor, love one another – not as you love yourself, but as **I have loved you**.

Jesus had tried to bring these disciples together into a community, a family, but it was, at times, a dysfunctional family. One was a betrayer, one was about to go into denial, one would break away but come back with doubts, and we have no idea where the others might have been in their thinking, in their faith journey. So Jesus set a new standard – love one another, not with patience, or tolerance, and not just do the best you can, but love one another, **as I have loved you**, with a love that is perpetually forgiving, with a love that serves selflessly, even washing the feet of those who are undeserving, with a love that even gives up life, so that others may live. With this new commandment, Jesus created this new family, which today we call the church.

We know that the church is still flawed – like any family, it is still imperfect. We generally don't like to talk about coming from dysfunctional families. We don't like to remember unloving moments from our childhood. We may remember but we also recognize that we have to move on. In the same way, if there are broken relationships within the family of our church, we try to make the best of it; we try not to let it interfere with our life and work, and we know that we have to move on. But truth is still there, and at times painfully evident: we do not love one another as Jesus loved us. Individually, and in our fellowship, we are in need of being made new, by God, so that we can have the love of Christ grow within us. Maybe we need to have that new commandment read to us again, and again, to remind us of our destination, of the goal that is something truly worth striving toward, to love one another as much as Jesus loves us.

And yet, sadly and realistically, the bottom line remains, we are a family that is just like a human family, with eccentric uncles, disobedient children, missing cousins, and we ourselves, each one of us, are not perfect. We need to be better, we should be held to a higher standard, we need to be made new. Scripture tells us that we **will** be made new. This is the promise given to us in Revelation. God will make all things new – a new heaven, a new earth, a New Jerusalem ...and I might add, a new me and a new you.

Unfortunately, we are not there yet. Our relationship with God is not yet as it should be, even for the most devout or pious among us. We need a new experience of God, an experience of God being so near to us, that God personally will be by our side and wipe away every tear.

Take a moment and think about the best family moments you can remember. Not just birthday parties or Christmas dinners, but think about those tender, loving moments, maybe a time when Dad could even say, "I love you," or at least give you a hug. Or maybe a time when Mom would give you a hug, kiss the hurt, and get a tissue and wipe the tear from your cheeks. If you can't remember such a tender moment, then try to imagine it, and then picture God being that close, that tender and that loving. Now consider how you can share that same tender love with others in your family, and especially in this family.

Love one another, not just with words, but as John wrote in his first letter to the churches, "Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action."

Love one another, even as I have loved you. A new commandment, given to us by our Lord Jesus. Just as he gave that commandment to the disciples, even as his betrayer was leaving the room, so in the midst of our sinfulness, in the midst of our brokenness, we are reminded of this new commandment, "Love one another, as I have loved you." Amen.