



Sermon Transcript

July 11, 2021

Love One Another

Encourage One Another!

John 13:34-35

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on July 11, 2021 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by David Rucquoi. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio and video version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com

Sermon Text
John 13:34-35

³⁴ “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Introduction

A few weeks ago my wife and I went to a funeral home to pay homage to a dear brother, and to support his family. Our friend was six years younger than me. He owned and ran a fitness club and was (by all appearances) a picture of health. He was always upbeat, always smiling, always full of energy, always encouraging. His death from a sudden heart attack surprised everyone. The line into the funeral home was extremely long, and it was quite a while before we could even see our friend's wife and children. They stood together, gracious, clearly tired, clearly broken, clearly supporting each other, and clearly strong. As we slowly made our way toward them, I watched in awe. No father or husband would want this for his family. No father or husband could be more proud of how his family was handling it, together. Their every word, action and slightest mannerisms honored the man. Undoubtedly, the excellence of our friend's life was reflected in his family. Just as likely, his family was compelled to honor the man they so admired, loved, and missed.

In his commentary on John, Gary Burge observed how chapters 13-17 include all the elements of a Jewish person preparing for a final farewell, as Jesus provides an intimate discourse including assurance, warning, exhortation, comfort, concern, and even the passing of his "spirit," as was done by Moses toward Joshua (Num. 27:18; Deut. 34:9), and Elijah toward Elisha (2 Kings 2:9-14). What we have in our text today is the beginning of that discourse, as Jesus prepares His children to support each other and be strong in His absence.

In this second of our summer series covering the "one another" passages in the New Testament, we will be looking at the commandment to "love one another." Our primary text is John 13, where we find five of the 100 New Testament references to "one another," a little over half of which are in the form of a command. Of those, I counted 19 that reference love "one another." That means a little more than one third of all the "one another" commands are that we love one another. As a student of Scripture, such a strong emphasis causes me to lean in closer to hear and understand what our Lord is telling us.

John's gospel was the last of the four composed, written around AD 100. John had the benefit of knowing what the other gospels said, how people responded to them over time, and he was addressing a much broader audience. Because of this, John deliberately takes a different approach avoiding parables, citing different miracles, emphasizing Jesus' deity, and using word-pictures and logic to make sure that the most

important elements of the gospel were presented as effectively as possible to the culture and issues of the day.

John and his older brother James were cousins of Jesus (their mothers were sisters). John was known to be turbulent, passionate, ambitious, well-connected, a leader among the twelve disciples and one of three repeatedly identified as part of Jesus' inner-circle (including James and Peter). John's gospel is the only one in which his name is not mentioned. Every time I read John I am reminded of Sally Field's acceptance speech, for her second Oscar, for her role in "Places in the Heart," in 2011. This veteran actress, gushing with amazement and brokenness, thanked key people, then vulnerably said to the Academy and all those present, "I want to say thank you to you. I haven't had an orthodox career, and I wanted more than anything to have your respect. The first time I didn't feel it, but this time I feel it." She paused, grinning ear-to-ear and full of exuberance as she said, "And I can't deny the fact that you like me, right now." She paused again, adding with utter amazement, "You like me!" It is with a similar sense of gratitude and wonder, John refers to himself as the disciple "*whom Jesus loved*" (John 13:23).

The events in John 13 take place toward the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. In John 12 we see Jesus coming into Jerusalem in "The Triumphal Entry," then Jesus speaks plainly about His death being close at hand. Following this, Matthew's gospel records how Jesus directed the disciples to prepare the Passover (Matt. 26:17-19). Mark provides more details saying Jesus tasked two of His disciples with this responsibility (Mark 14:12-16). And Luke specifies that it was Peter and John who were given this task (Luke 22:7-13), details John leaves out.

William Barclay points out that it was customary for people to bath before going to a feast. And, due to the available footwear and the filth of the roads (which were traveled by animals), it would have been customary for feet to be washed upon entering the home, especially before a meal. This is illustrated in Luke 7. Jesus was invited for dinner at the home of a Pharisee, named Simon. During that meal a "woman of the city" (as she was referred to) anointed Jesus' feet with perfume, washing them with her tears and wiping them with her hair. Aware of His host's contempt for this woman, Jesus said to Simon (Luke 7:44), "*Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.*" Here Jesus acknowledges the neglected protocol of washing the guest's feet (as a sign of disrespect); and, in doing so, points out that this matters to Him. As Jesus engaged in this "Last Supper" everyone present

was aware of the cultural expectation, and Jesus' closest companions would have known this was important to Him. Unfortunately, no-one arranged to wash the guest's feet.

Jesus waited until they were having (if not finished with) the meal, when it was clear no one was going to take this responsibility. In Luke's account of the supper, the disciples began arguing, "...*which of them was to be regarded as the greatest*" (Luke 22:24). This was likely the point when Jesus quietly got up and disrobed, demonstrating His priorities, and washed their feet, even the feet of Judas (who, soon after, would leave to betray Jesus). In hindsight, we can be sad over what would happen to Jesus in the next 24 hours. Yet, on that night, the night He sought to have his last dinner with His friends as he prepared to die, the washing of the feet of the guests was neglected; so Jesus got up, disrobed, and did it Himself. And, lest we miss this critical point, in taking responsibility of this humbling task for the benefit of others, the record shows that the only person whose feet were not washed were those of the honored guest: Jesus.

If any disciple was inclined to say, "Oh, let me do that," we don't see any indication of it. And, after Jesus' response to Peter's initial objection, the room was likely silent with awkward shame and confusion, as they watched their master washing the feet of all the guests (and there is no reason to assume the guest list is limited to 13). Once finished, Jesus gives his opinion on their argument about who among them is the greatest, saying, "*If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet*" (13:14), providing the first use of "one another" in this chapter.

Some people debate whether the washing of the feet was of material importance, merely a nod of etiquette, or a metaphoric gesture. As we look to understand the command to love "one another," I suggest it is all three. I am reminded that while we rightly remember George Washington as our noble first president, his prestigious legacy overshadows a modest introduction into history. When Washington was appointed General over the Revolutionary forces, one of his first official duties was to address the greatest threat to the army. That threat was not the British forces; rather, it was disease and sickness among his troops, as more troops were dying from dysentery than in combat. So, Washington created written policy supported by repeated training, and firm enforcement, for how and where his troops should relieve themselves. Apparently, these militia men were accustomed to working on their farms, "going" whenever, wherever, however they wanted; but, in the close quarters of military life, this was creating havoc, and the need for a disciplined, clear and harshly enforced policy was called for, to have an army available for real warfare. As we have experienced a pandemic and learned how the post-biblical history of the Mediterranean region

experienced three back-to-back pandemics due to disease and living conditions, the need for foot washing (especially before eating) was clearly profound. Because of this, to not do it was extremely disrespectful (whether they understood why or not). While Jesus took full opportunity to convey a spiritual lesson through this reality (“*If I do not wash you, you have no share with me,*” 13:8), we must not overlook the fact that Jesus washed their feet in foresight for health, to raise the bar of consideration, to lower the bar on pride, and to set a precedent.

Jesus then discusses the one who will betray Him, instigating the second reference to “one another,” as the disciple’s exchange glances, wondering who the traitor is. This is a use of the term “one another” that is not a command and demonstrates what it means to call this term a “reciprocal pronoun” (I encourage those present to take a moment to look around the room at each other to experience first-hand what it means to “one another”).

It is at this point Jesus starts talking about what He calls “*A new commandment,*” giving the 3-5th usage of “one another” in this chapter, as we read from John 13:34-35:

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

It might seem confusing to call this “*a new commandment,*” since Jesus is depicted earlier in his ministry quoting Leviticus 19:18 (which tells us to love our neighbor) calling it the second greatest command. So why is he now calling it new?

Prior to this event, Matthew, Mark and Luke, described Jesus’ dialogue on “the greatest commandment.” Each writer reports the event uniquely, which is important to understand as we consider how John captures this. We moderns get thrown off by the differences in each account, as we read this from a culture that demands (and pretends) that journalistic and forensic precision are required. However, one only need watch the same news event on CNN, NBC, and Fox to realize that we too blatantly present news based on perspective, values and audience, only we try to pretend that we do not. To us, variation in the gospels suggests error. But, when this was written, interpretation and perspective were openly and matter-of-factly accepted. Like the three blind men feeling a different part of an elephant, they saw no conflict in each writer representing different aspects of the same event. That people might notice the difference not only didn’t bother them, they hoped people would.

Matthew appeals to a Jewish audience (as a repentant tax collector), relating the story to the law and the prophets, showing Jesus confronted by Pharisees and Sadducees. Matthew's version is closely aligned with the Jewish text in vocabulary and grammar, using three words (translated in English as "heart, soul and mind") reflecting the three elements from Deuteronomy 4. He presents **Jesus as the Messiah** (Matt. 22).

Mark focuses on the **credentials of Christ** to a Roman audience. His version, indicates a question regarding the most important commandment, asked by a scribe, using four words (translated into English as "heart, soul, mind and strength") to make sure the full meaning of the Jewish text is understood by a Roman audience (Mark 12).

Luke, the only confirmed Gentile Apostle, presents Jesus to a Greek audience as a **perfect man**. Deliberately avoiding Jewish references, his version has a lawyer asking, "... *what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*" And Jesus turns the question back on the lawyer, reflecting the instincts of a wise debater. He too uses four Greek words (translated in English as heart, soul, strength and mind) to capture the meaning of the original Hebrew text (Luke 10).

John's gospel is also unique. He is the disciple who most emphasizes God's love, using more references to love than the other three gospels combined. So, we look to John's unique perspective of "The Greatest Commandment" for profound truth about love. To our surprise, John does not mention the story at all. With his priority on the Word and love, John was concerned that religious treatment of the Shema trivialized the message (this ancient Hebrew creed from Deut. 4 was, and is, attached to door posts, worn as phylacteries, and recited with precise rules throughout the day and on special occasions by religious Jews). It was John who later wrote, "*let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth*" (1 John 3:18). John doesn't debate the earlier dialogue about the greatest commandment. He simply omits it; yet, as if presenting an alternative, John is the only gospel writer to capture the foot washing and Jesus' admonition, "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another*" (John 13:34).

So, what is so new about this "*new commandment?*" The first thing we notice is that the old commandment, as recorded in Leviticus 19 and the first three gospels, is to "*love your neighbor*", where the new commandment (here in John's gospel) is to "*love one another.*" Luke records the lawyer asking, "*And who is my neighbor?*" reflecting the importance of clarifying who the intended recipient of our love is, prompting Jesus'

story of the Good Samaritan. That's the old commandment. Interestingly, nowhere does John record Jesus telling us this no longer applies. Then we read (in Gal. 6:10), "*So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*" Hendriksen states that a "sphere of special concern" is "to be expected," comparing this to a parent's first duty toward their own children. And so, as Scott mentioned last week, we understand these "one another" commands are directed to the church. We see this in Paul's discourse to the Roman church, where he's encouraging them to build up the body, and adds, "*Love one another with brotherly affection, outdo one another in showing honor*" (Rom. 12:10). We see it in Ephesians, where Paul states, "*...walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called ... bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (Eph. 4:1-3). The writer of Hebrews is clearly encouraging the church when they write, "*And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together...*" (Heb. 10:24-25). And Peter (who objected to Jesus washing his feet, and later in today's chapter gets the first lesson of his own denial of Jesus, then later meets Jesus on a beach, where he finally grasped the lesson of the foot washing) is clearly speaking to the church when he writes, "*Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,*" (1 Pet. 1:22). So this new command does not replace the old command, and it is directed to how we act within the church.

A second difference, between the old command and the new command, is that all four of the sources of the old command (Lev., Matt, Mark, Luke) stipulate that you should love your neighbor "*as yourself,*" where in the new command Jesus stipulates, "*just as I have loved you.*" While the old command remains in place, it uses the self as the standard of measure, not unlike the golden rule. In the new commandment, the standard of measure is how Jesus has demonstrated love to them. Later Jesus states, "*By this all people will know that you are my disciples*" (13:35), and even later, "*...so that the world may know that you [The Father] sent me and loved them...*" (John 17:23). Clearly, Jesus is eager to reach the world; and his strategy to do it is through a compelling, observable, reciprocating love between the people of the Church, beginning with Himself. And this is what we see with the foot washing. When Jesus explains why He washed their feet He states, "*For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you*" (13:15). It is no coincidence that a few verses later he states, "*love one another: just as I have loved you*" (13:34, underlining is mine). The way in which love is to reciprocate within the church had just been demonstrated through the foot washing. So, what can we glean from His example? As I mention observable elements of Jesus' love, I encourage you to think about your role here at WEFC. Do any of these elements bring

to mind an opportunity for you to practice loving one another here? You see, on that day we see Jesus:

- motivated by the needs of others, not his own contentment or comfort.
- assumed responsibility to resolve an issue over the opportunity to complain.
- chose to get dirty, not mad.
- chose to own the problem, not delegate it.
- embraced humility instead of demanding respect.
- chose to serve instead of expecting to receive.

Brothers and sisters, none of us should expect that we will be obedient to this commandment anywhere else if we do not first take it seriously right here in our own church. And, to paraphrase one of my professors, if you so love one another, you will be dangerous to hell. If you're not dangerous to hell, you will be dangerous to the church.

With this commandment we find ourselves not being told to dismiss the old command; but, we are being told to add something new. Carson says it this way, "...it is not so much that Christians are to love the world less, as that they are to love one another more." And the new thing we are supposed to add is a reciprocating tangible care within the church. This concept of what is referred to as a "reciprocating pronoun" is not simply that we mirror what Jesus has done; rather, it is like two mirrors facing each other, reflecting back and forth to infinity. This is a command for all of us to exercise together, all the time, preferring one another back and forth. I first came upon this concept studying 1 Cor. 13:7. There, in the "all things" section, I found myself confronted by the word "all;" which, in this case, does not refer to a total number. Instead, it refers to "as many as." It would be as if a baseball umpire didn't say, "that's all of 'em, your out" (for three swings that missed); rather that he said, "swing all you want," giving that little word "all" a completely different meaning. When we are told, "love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things" the daunting notion is that this applies to everyone, all the time, in all circumstances at all costs. Something within me rebelled, hoping to find a governor to prevent total vulnerability. And, without getting into too much detail, while there are governors, God's intent is that the governors are not necessary within the body of Christ. Exceptions may apply toward the ungodly; but, between mutually submitted children of God, there should be a reverberating, back-and-forth delight of mutual obedience that is radical, unworldly, and unavoidably noticed by those outside the family of God reflecting the evidence and most profound nature of God Himself.

Tim Keller explains the Trinity by saying that “Each of the divine persons centers upon the others. None demands that the others revolve around him. Each voluntarily circles the other two, pouring love, delight, and adoration into them. That creates a dynamic, pulsating dance of joy and love. The early leaders of the Greek church had a word for this – perichoresis. Notice our word “choreography” within it. It means literally to “dance or flow around.” Here we see the church is called to model the Trinity. It is no wonder we see the Trinity referenced in 13:20, where Jesus says, *“Truly, truly I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.”* This loving “one another” models the Godhead. We see it evidenced in the early church, where we read, *“And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved”* (Acts 2:44-47). I’m your church planting intern. To plant a church, or grow this church, love one another, as Jesus demonstrated that day! Burge captures the same thought when he states, “the community of believers must be a refuge, a place of unparalleled affection and service that will at once set it apart from its environment.”

Years ago some college friends and I were visiting a church and a recently divorced woman was vacuuming, and crying. When I asked her what was wrong she could only say, “I just don’t understand the love between you and your friends.” This brings us to a very critical notion I would be wrong to ignore. What was powerful about Jesus’ example of foot washing was not that feet got washed. As much as that was important, it was commonplace. What was powerful was that it was Jesus doing the washing. It would be impossible for me to wash someone else’s feet, or love them in such a profound way, if I did not internalize and embrace what He has done for me. Burge says it this way, “Jesus only expects his disciples to wash someone else’s feet after they have been washed themselves.” The Apostle John confirms this saying, *“God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. ¹⁰ This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other”* (1 John 4:9-11, NLT). The passage in John 13 presents us with a powerful dichotomy. On the one hand, we can embrace the love of Jesus, and pass it to others; or, like Judas, we can experience His love, reject it, and run out into the darkness. But we cannot give away that which we ourselves have not received. The gift of His love is offered, available and free. The ultimate question we

all must face is whether we accept His love or reject it.

I began this message talking about a dear friend, who's family strongly represented his grace and character after he died. I have tried to show that Jesus' command for us to "*love one another*" as He has loved us was the poignant last message of a man to his family, knowing he would soon die, preparing them to carry on His legacy among each other for generations to come. This is Jesus' strategy to reach a lost world. I have since come upon a song written and performed by Keith Urban that captures what Jesus was trying to do. The lyrics are as follows:

The older I get
The more I can see
How much he loved my mother and my brother and me
And he did the best that he could
And I only hope when I have my own family
That everyday I see

A little more of my father in me

There were times I thought he was bein'
Just a little bit hard on me
But now I understand he was makin' me
Become the man he knew that I could be
In everything he ever did
He always did with love
And I'm proud today to say I'm his son
When somebody says I hope I get to meet your dad
I just smile and say you already have

Jesus said, "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*" (John 13:34-35).

© by David Rucquoi - All rights reserved

Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 374-375.

William Barclay, *The New Daily Study Bible, The Gospel of John* Volume 1 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 7-ff.

YouTube, Sally Field winning and Oscar for “Places in the Heart,” Accessed July 7, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_8nAvU0T5Y.

William Barclay, *The New Daily Study Bible, The Gospel of John* Volume 2 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 165.

Regretfully, I cannot recall which biography of George Washington I had read, for bibliographical reference.

James L. Kugel, *The Bible As It Was* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 506.

William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House 1968), 238.

Rob Reimer, *Soul Care: 7 Transformational Principles For A Healthy Soul* (Franklin, TN: Carpenter’s Son Publishing: 2016), 31.

D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John. EGNT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 485.

Goodreads, *Summer Reading*, Timothy J. Keller, Accessed March 18, 2019, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/369853-each-of-the-divine-persons-centers-upon-the-others-none>.

Burge, 381.

Ibid.

Keith Urban, “Song For Dad,” Accessed June 7, 2021, <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/keithurban/songfordad.html>.”