

The Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 18, 2025, St. Michael's Church

Daniel Ince

May the Words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen

When Momi and I were involved with Marriage Encounter, one of the important thoughts for the couples to remember came from John 15:12 - "Love one another, as I have loved you" which was also printed under the Marriage Encounter logo as a reminder.

Because of that experience, I don't think that it was odd that Jesus would tell his followers to love one another. However, what does seem interesting to me is that he phrased it as a commandment.

"Commandment" or "mandate" are pretty strong words. They carry an imperative with it, which didn't leave any room for question or debate. He might have said to them, "You WILL do this." I've read that the Latin origin for the word "mandate" is "Mandatum", "You WILL love one another. I command it!"

This commandment appears in the three Synoptic Gospels as, "The greatest commandment is to Love God and your neighbor" using the Old Testament as authority. However, in this Gospel from John, Jesus doesn't cite a Biblical source but gives this command on his own authority.

However, I think that it's interesting that Jesus doesn't say that they have to like each other. This is certainly good because, as we all know, some people are simply more likeable than others. It's probably true

with our families and acquaintances and even here in the church. Yes, it's a good thing that Jesus didn't tell us that we have to like one another, or we would probably be in real trouble.

I'm sure that it was also true among Jesus' disciples who, as we've heard, would bicker among themselves like normal humans. John was definitely not fond of Judas Iscariot. He had called Judas a liar and a thief which leaves little doubt that he didn't care for the betrayer at all. John may not have gotten along with some of the others as well. And there's enough evidence from other stories about their adventures with Jesus to leave little doubt that the disciples had their share of family squabbles.

Yes, it's a good thing that Jesus did not command his disciples to like one another. But what he did was to require them to love each other. Otherwise, things could have gotten difficult in a hurry.

The followers of Jesus did have some obvious things in common with each other. They were all Galilean Jews which means that their dialects and their views of the wider world might have been similar. However, there were also some obvious differences such as that one was a zealot and another was a tax collector. Some were fishermen and were used to hard labor on the sea, while others wouldn't have known what it was like to have a callous on their hands. It may have been a good thing that Jesus commanded them to love one another, because otherwise Christianity might have been dead in the water before it began.

Today is the fifth Sunday of Easter, and this conversation between Jesus and his disciples takes place in the upper room the night before Jesus was to be crucified. I was wondering why this portion of John's gospel is assigned to be read today rather than during the Lenten

season. I've read that, of the four gospels, John spends more time giving us what are called "the farewell discourses." The other gospels allude to some of Jesus' final sayings, but John focuses on them and this was important to him. Jesus is preparing his followers for that time when he will no longer be with them in the flesh. He's establishing what their behavior should be once he's gone. We're also trying to better understand what his disciples would be doing after Jesus was gone from them. We are looking back at what he told them and, what he said to them because Jesus is also telling us.

Jesus and the disciples were walking toward Jerusalem and, since they had been walking quite a while on a dirt road, they all had sweat on their faces and dust on their feet. As we've heard in the Gospel stories, the disciples had been arguing along the way about who was going to be the greatest in this coming kingdom that Jesus had been telling them about.

They had heard what Jesus had been teaching and had seen his encounters with the various religious authorities. Most of the disciples had the definite impression that things were about to come to a head and that the Kingdom that Jesus had been telling them about would be happening soon. So, a major item on their personal agendas was to see what roles they would be playing in this kingdom. Some of them thought that, if they played their cards right, they might come out looking pretty good which angered the others.

Since Jesus was close to his disciples, he recognized what they were feeling toward each other so Jesus took a basin of water and a towel and began to wash their feet. Suddenly, the mood in the room changed from anger to guilt. If there was anybody there who shouldn't have been on his knees washing the others' feet, it was Jesus. But, before

they had a chance to react to their guilty feelings, Jesus informed them that one of them would betray him. Suddenly, paranoia replaced the feelings of guilt.

I think that every family probably has gone through difficult periods from time to time. It may be the death or extreme illness of one of the family members. They might have to make a decision about what to do with the parents now that they had gotten to the point in life that they can no longer properly take care of themselves. I'm sure that every family will encounter this kind of crisis sooner or later.

Each family will handle their crisis in their own way. When these experiences came to the two sides of our family, we got together and talked with each other, sharing earnestly about how to deal with the struggle that had come our way. When there were differences of opinion among us, we listened to each other's input and came to a consensus about the best way to deal with the needs of our loved ones.

Well, this conversation between Jesus and his disciples was also a family in crisis. It's time for him to lay it all out for his followers and let them know what he expects of them. I think that there was probably an incredible silence after they heard Jesus tell them that one of them would betray him and Judas had left the room to go out into the darkness of betrayal. It was like Judas had taken all of the oxygen out of the room with him and they probably found themselves gasping for air. There was nothing left but this thick, dense silence. I think that the disciples were trying to settle their emotions down because, if they didn't, they might explode.

And instinctively, they knew that if anyone is going to cut through that awful silence, it would have to be Jesus. Then Jesus said to them, "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."

Whatever the disciples may have been expecting, Jesus broke the silence by giving them a new commandment to love one another. But what's so new about that? What is this "new" commandment Jesus that talked about? What's so new about love?

I've always been a fan of Peanuts and can identify with Charlie Brown. I think that it also can make the point about love. In one strip, Lucy says to Charlie Brown, "You know what I don't understand? I don't understand love!" Charlie Brown says, "Who does? Lucy replies, "Explain love to me, Charlie Brown." He says, "You can't explain love. I can recommend a book or a poem or a painting, but I can't explain love." She says, "Well, try, Charlie Brown, try." So, Charlie says, "Well, let's say I see this beautiful, cute little girl walk by." Lucy interrupts, "Why does she have to be cute? Huh? Why can't someone fall in love with someone with freckles and a big nose? Explain that!" Charlie says, "Well, maybe you are right. Let's just say I see this girl walk by with this great big nose...." Lucy shouts, "I didn't say GREAT BIG NOSE." Hanging his head, which he often did when he dealt with Lucy, Charlie says, "Not only can you not explain love—you can't even talk about it."

Maybe Charlie couldn't talk about love. But that didn't stop St. Paul when he wrote to the Philippians. He described how Jesus modeled for his disciples the kind of love that Jesus wanted them to have for one another. He wrote, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human

form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death--even death on a cross."

"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." Then he went out and showed them, and us, what kind of love he meant when he yielded his life for us on a cross.

So, the next time that we wonder whether we're capable of showing the love that Jesus continues to show us, consider what he did for us. I don't think that it's asking too much that we respond to Jesus' unlimited love by trying harder to love one another.

Let us pray, "Lord, may we love as Jesus loves us and find us faithful in the attempt to do it. Thanks be to the God who shows us such unlimited love and Amen."