

John 13:31 When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³² If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³ Little 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.' ³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

By this...

John 13:31-35

I give you new commandment, says Jesus, that you love one another. When I read that the other day, the first thought that came to my mind is, *how is that a new commandment?* Loving your neighbor is hardly a new concept in the Bible. It is, after all, the great commandment, "Love the Lord your God, and love your neighbor as yourself."

And Jesus didn't make that up, either. It goes all the way back to Leviticus 19:18 – "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

So, why does Jesus say this is a *new* commandment? Maybe the new part isn't *that* we love one another, but *how* we love one another...the next phrase in Jesus' commandment: "As I have loved you, so you are to love one another." *That* is a new commandment, and a difficult one. We are not only to love one another, but to do so with the depth, breadth, and height of Jesus' love for us. We are to love one another with the same unconditional love that Jesus has for us. We are to love one another with the same gracious love. We are to love with the same preferential option for the poor and outcast and rejected that Jesus displayed in having dinner with a tax collector named Zacchaeus, in talking to a Samaritan woman at the well who had had a half-dozen husbands, and the woman caught in adultery who was about to be stoned to death by the Pharisees. We are to love with the same compassion that Jesus showed to the crowds who followed him even when he was tired and needed rest; the same compassion for the sick, the lame, the blind, the demon-possessed.

In fact, when we love as he loved us, that is when we will be known by our love for each other. It would be great if we were known for having any kind of love for each other, instead of being known for being the frozen chosen, or the conflicted congregations, or the divided denomination that we are. But, Jesus challenges us to take it even a step beyond; to set our sights higher: to be known as the people who love one another the way Jesus loves us.

Jill Duffield is the editor of "Presbyterian Outlook" magazine. She emails a thought-provoking look at the lectionary readings for each week. This week's was particularly poignant as she told the story of a young Chinese-born woman named Jenna Cook, who had been abandoned on a street in a busy Chinese city. She was found, placed in an orphanage, then adopted by an American family. At the age of twenty, Jenna decided to try to find her birth mother, but had nothing to go on except the name of the street in the city in China where she had been left. She went to that city and put a story in the newspaper and on television, telling people how to contact her if they knew of a child who had been abandoned on that street twenty years ago. She was amazed when she was contacted by more than 50 families, all hoping that she was their long-lost daughter. They were all hoping to find their child, to find out if she was okay, to learn what had become of her. Of those 50 families, there was one mother who came to her with such a heart-wrenching story that, well, I'll let Jenna tell you herself.

"One birth mother brought a piece of cloth. She had used the cloth 20 years ago to sew a baby suit for the day that she and her daughter would part. And then she hoped that if she and her daughter were to reunite later, her daughter would have the baby suit and then she would have the scraps from the baby suit. And then it would be kind of like a lock and key. But I definitely didn't have such a baby suit..."

"I was so moved by the story and so distraught at my own inability to, like, have this suit materialize that I couldn't even say anything. I just remember, like, shaking my head to her and signaling that I hadn't seen it before. And she was just sobbing and sobbing and - gosh. I think there was a lot of sobbing, overall, from many families, from both mothers and fathers and grandparents and siblings, and - it was a lot of crying."¹

Jenna did not find her birth mother among those 50 families who responded to her ad. But her story embodies what I believe Jesus' message is for us in this commandment that we love one another as he has loved us. It is a remarkable story of people longing to be reunited after a long separation. Jenna Cook longs to be reunited with the family who felt they had no choice but to leave their infant daughter on a busy street. Fifty families show up, all longing to be reunited with a loved one whom they had to let go of. If we get down beneath the exteriors we all create, we, too, find this hunger to be reunited, to be re-

¹ <http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/04/12/473849033/>

connected to those around us, to those with whom we have lost contact, to those we feel are a half-a-world away.

Jesus shows us the way: Love one another as I have loved you. Love one another with a love that isn't afraid to bend one's knee to serve the other. Love one another with a love that isn't afraid to take the first step to find healing, even if we weren't the one who caused the hurt. Love one another with a love that accepts the other person exactly as they are, with no strings attached, no "if-then" clauses: "if you do this, then I'll love you."

Jill Duffield writes,

Love one another, that's what constitutes this Christ-community... What's new is the "like I have loved you" part. It is the without-guile-or-limit, lay-down-your-life-for-each-other love that recognizes that when we are united in Christ, through Christ, we are cut from the same cloth. We are clothed in Christ and we ache until we find the garment that matches the swatch we've carried and cherished for years with the hope against hope that it will be the key that unlocks the door to reunion, reconciliation, our beginning and our end.²

We are one with each other because we are one with Christ; cut from the same cloth; united in love by Jesus' love for us.

"By this," says Jesus, "everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

In a moment we will gather at the table and eat of the one loaf that is the body of Christ. We will drink of the one cup that is Christ's blood. As we do so, we will be reunited with him like a lock and key, sealed in his blood, sealed in his love for us that accepts us just the way we are, forgives us for everything we've ever done wrong, sees us as the children we are who have gone missing and have been reunited like a scrap of cloth being reunited with the bolt from which we were cut.

Such love he has shown for us. How can we not love one another with a love cut from that same cloth? By this the world will know who we are...and whose we are, that we are his disciples, if we love one another as Jesus has loved us.

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² "Looking into the Lectionary" by Jill Duffield, an email from The Presbyterian Outlook sent April 18, 2016