

## A New Command

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

In his book *Life Looks Up*, Charles Templeton remarks how ironic it is that the course of human history has been affected so positively and negatively by events that have occurred in two small upper rooms. One of them is a drab flat in London's Westside, dirty, curtainless, with stacks of articles on the table and worn manuscripts, aborted attempts wadded up in the trash can. Seated at the table a man labors over a writing, a writing that would overthrow governments, enslave millions of people, and negatively affect the course of history for a generation to come. The man: Karl Marx; his writing: *Das Kapital*, the handbook for the Communist revolution.

But there's another upper room that also figures in the course of human history: this one located in one of the oldest cities of the world, Jerusalem, and here also there was a table. Thirteen gather at this table to share a meal and to hear the words of a man whose love and sacrifice would make a lasting impact on human history. His message -- that faith in God and love for one another would revolutionize governments and change the lives of countless generations of people to come.

How strange it is that some 1800 years later, Karl Marx would proclaim that strife among people, rigid control of possessions, strict limitation of personal freedom and a move toward a godless society would bring about the perfect world that humanity was seeking. For the key to the kind of life that you and I desire had already been given to us. It was there in the words of Jesus in that upper room.

This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you. This is my will for you. This is what I expect. This is my desire for all people -- that my joy may be in you and your joy may be full. Love one another. What a model for successful living!

Love one another as I have loved you, Jesus tells us. Let my love for you be an example; let my love for you inspire you, enrich, enlighten, and empower you to love one another. That same evening as the disciples gathered with Jesus for his final meal, Jesus demonstrated for them the meaning of love. Listen to what John says in his Gospel:

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel.

He washed the disciples' feet. He took for himself the role of a servant. And the disciples were horrified. How could he, their leader, serve them? That's not the way it's done. In the real world, we strive to be served by others. But not when we follow the example of Jesus' love. Jesus says,

Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.

Love one another. Follow the example of my love as you serve and care for one another. Pastor Roy L. Smith, who for many years was the editor of *Guideposts* magazine, was not yet eighteen years old when he received a hurried message at school that his father had been hurt at the mill where he worked. As Roy

ran down Main Street of Nickerson, Kansas, a blunt man cried out to him, "No use runnin', kid. He's already gone."

Roy's father was a skilled mechanic and flour miller and highly respected in town. On the day of his funeral every business in town was closed. The day before the funeral, Roy and his brother went up to the mill to collect their father's things. Among the tools and belongings were the clothes he had on the day he was killed. They were all packed up in a paper sack and there on top of the sack were his dad's shoes, soles turned up. And there in the center of each shoe was a big hole in the sole.

The day Roy's dad died; he had stood on the concrete floor with a hole in his shoes. Now that's not something that's so remarkable for those who grew up years ago when times were tough. What is remarkable, however, is the fact that less than a week before he died, his father had taken Roy down to the department store and bought him a new pair of shoes to wear to school. Looking back, Roy says that he would have given anything if only he had put a good pair of shoes on his father's feet for the last hour of his life.

That's the kind of love that God has for us in Christ. Love that sacrifices itself for us. Love that bends down in service and reaches out in love. This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you. If we are to have Jesus as our role model, it means that we are going to have to roll up our sleeves and get down to the business of loving one another. It means that we are going to have to commit ourselves to serving Christ in the needs of those around us. As Jesus has said,

Whatever you do to the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you do unto me. Love one another, as I have loved you.

At no time does a person speak with greater sincerity and honesty than when that person knows they are going to die. Those are times when foolishness has no room, when sincerity and truth have center stage. As Jesus gathered his disciples together with him in that upper room, he knew that the end was near. He knew that the cross awaited him. And he knew what his disciples needed to hear. That's why he left them that final commandment, that Living Will for them -- that they love one another.

As we gather to receive the bread and cup, as we gather to "do this in remembrance," we are to remember Jesus Will for us -- that we love one another. That night in the upper room Jesus knew what it would take to change the world -- not strife and revolution, not warfare and bloodshed, but love, sincere, self-sacrificing love on the part of God's people.