**A NEW COMMAND**

 May 14, 2017

John 13:18-38 / Key Verse: 13:34-35

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

Last week we learned that Jesus washed his disciples’ feet as the expression of his love toward them. Jesus deliberately did this when he knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Every father does the most important thing to his children when he knows that he has his last hour. Jesus had taught and cared for his disciples until now and they grew much. Most of all, each of them grew to have personal love relationship with Jesus. But there was one thing that they lacked most. It was to love one another between them. So when Jesus knew that his last hour is near, he showed them how to love one another by setting an example of washing their feet. In today’s passage, Jesus gives them loving one another as a new command. In this command is Jesus’ ultimate vision to change this world. So let’s learn what Jesus’ new command means to us?

**I. Jesus predicts Judas’ betrayal (18-30)**

After washing his disciples’ feet and explaining the purpose of his washing their feet, Jesus began to refer to most painful thing; Judas’ betrayal. Look at verse 18. “I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture: ‘He who shared my bread has turned against me.’ Here, “has turned against me” has another comment in Greek; “has lifted up his heel.” This is an expression of betrayal. Among many kinds of pain, betrayal is one of the most painful things to everyone. To most people betrayal is very hard to bear. Usually people revenge more than he got hurt. But Jesus was different. How did Jesus deal with it? Jesus said, “…But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture…” Jesus accepted the most painful event as the fulfillment of Scripture which means the fulfillment of God’s sovereign will. Jesus did not think that he would die because of Judas’ betrayal but because of the will of God. Because Jesus had such God-centered perspective, he was not angry at Judas nor consumed by revengeful emotion toward him. Rather he could continue to love him to the end just like he continued to love other disciples to the end. Here, we learn that whether we experience joyful things or painful things we must see all of them in God-centered perspective in light of the word of God. When we do so, like Jesus we can overcome our human emotion or sinful nature and continue to pursue the will of God loving even those who hurt us and betray us.

Jesus tells Judas’ betrayal to prepare other disciples so that when it does happen they may not fall into doubt of Jesus and themselves but come to know and believe in Jesus more firmly. Look at verse 19. “I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am.” Here “I am who I am” is God’s very name. It means that later when Judas’ betrayal happens, they will come to know and believe in Jesus as God. God knows everything; even things inside people’s heart and mind before they tell anything. Judas’ betrayal could make all other disciples doubt and wonder about whether Jesus failed in his disciple ministry or not and what if they themselves fail too as disciples someday like Judas. But Jesus tells Judas’ betrayal in advance to help them to know that Judas’ betrayal is not Jesus’ failure but Judas’ personal problem of refusing the love of Jesus. In the midst of telling very painful betrayal, Jesus was full of vision about other disciples. Look at verse 20. “Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.” Here “anyone I send” is “the disciples whom Jesus chose.” While Judas is betraying, Jesus has clear assurance that all other disciples will remain in him and be sent out to the world by him and through them many will accept him and God the Father who sent him.

Yet, after he had said this, Jesus didn’t hide his troubled heart. In verse 21, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified. “Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.” How did the disciples respond to Jesus’ sudden shocking announcement? In verse 22, his disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. In Matthew 26:22, Matthew recorded that they were very sad and began to say to him one after the other. “Surely you don’t mean me, Lord?” But in John’s gospel, John wrote that Peter took the initiative to figure out who was going to betray Jesus but it was John who was close to Jesus and asked the question. Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” (26a) Then he dipped the bread and gave it to Judas. “Jesus ‘giving the bread” meant “Jesus gave his own life; his very body to pay the penalty of the sin of all sinners. It was the greatest love that Jesus could give to all sinners including Judas. But Judas rejected Jesus’ love. Judas rejected the final chance to be saved by Jesus. When he rejected his love, what happened to him? Verse 27 says, “As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.” Now he was no longer himself. He was Satan’s instrument. Verse 30 says, “As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.” In John’s gospel, “night” symbolizes “spiritual night” as well. By rejecting Jesus’ love, he was embraced by the darkness of Satan. It was the beginning of his descent into eternal condemnation in the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

**II. Jesus gives a new command (31-38)**

Look at verses 31-32. What did Jesus say when Judas was gone? Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.” In the midst of his troubled heart and sorrow, instead of being overwhelmed by sorrowful emotion, Jesus’ central desire was to glorify God. Here “glorified” means “reveals the love of God in its richness and depth.” Jesus did this by loving the betrayer to the end and eventually Jesus would glorify God most of all by revealing God’s amazing love toward all betrayers and all enemies of God through his obedience to death on the cross.

Look at verse 33. Jesus called his disciples “my children.” Indeed Jesus’ disciples became his children. Jesus had loved them and cared for them like children. But now it was time of his departure and their parting. Jesus knew how much they would long for him and look for him when he was gone. Jesus knew that it would be hard for them for a while. But Jesus’ love does not mean to just give them only comfortable and easy life. Rather, true love includes giving them difficulties to let them grow stronger in a long run. So now Jesus told them clearly that they would not be able to come with him now. It would be the time for them to learn to live without human Jesus being with them in the body to eventually depend on the Holy Spirit whom they would receive later so that they could grow as independent and stronger men of God.

Then Jesus gave them a new command. Let’s read today’s key verses 34-35. “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Until now the disciples had concentrated on their personal love relationship with Jesus. Each one had formed an intimate relationship with Jesus. But now it was time for them to learn to love one another. Then why does Jesus call his command of “Love one another” a new command? Then what is God’s old command? What are the two greatest old commandments among all God’s Law? In Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus confirmed these two greatest old commandments, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all you mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandment.” Then in what sense, Jesus’ command of love is new?

(1) In Jesus’ New Command, the phrase, “As I have loved you” was added. God’s two greatest Old Commands of love are perfect and they summarize all God’s law. But can we fulfill these perfect commands of love in our own ability? No one can do it because we all are fallen sinners. But when Jesus gave his new command to his disciples, Jesus said, “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” Here, notice that Jesus’ new command starts from knowing Jesus’ love first. Before we love one another, first we must know how Jesus loved us and receive his holy love given to us freely. How Jesus loved us will be the standard of our love and also the source of our love. Our fundamental problem in obeying God’s command is that we are not able to obey God’s command in our own strength or ability. But good news for us is that Jesus’ love was poured out into our heart through the Holy Spirit when we believe in Jesus. (Romans 5:5). So when we know Jesus’ love and receive his love, to love one another is not heavy burden to us but joy to us because the more we practice his love, the more we experience his love and eventually we can grow in Jesus’ divine love. While we are struggling to learn and follow Jesus, anyone can experience ups and downs of our life of faith. Sometimes we experience failure or down slope of our life. But we don’t need to be discouraged in despair because we are not living only in our own strength but we are living in the love of God given to us in Christ. So whenever we feel lack of love or dryness in our heart, we can always go back to Jesus ‘never-failing love and start over to practice his love again. In the last few years, among us, I have sensed that Wah Paw and Samuel have grown much reflecting the love of God through their life of faith and humble serving and caring. In Lamentation 3:19-23, the prophet Jeremiah once shared his experience of affliction, wandering, bitterness, and downcast soul. Yet because he remembered LORD’s great unfailing love, he could hold hope firmly. He confessed, “Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassion never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” Like Jeremiah, when we remember the love of God in Jesus, we can continue to walk with God and love one another as Jesus loved us and we can grow as mature men and women of God.

(2) Jesus’ command to love one another was given particularly for the relationship between the disciples. Until now the disciples focused their lives on having personal love relationship with Jesus. They did not care for nor love one another much. But now is the time for them to circulate Jesus’ divine love among them and to form strong love relationship between them in the basis of Jesus’ love. If they do so, they will be recognized as true disciples of Jesus by people living in unbelieving world and this is Jesus’ ultimate vision for all the disciples and all people living on earth. After all, what really changes people’s heart is Jesus’ love. Remember that Jesus’ love is to love first not waiting until others love me first. Taking initiative and showing the example of love first is the way of how Jesus’ love works effectively always.

Lastly in verses 36-38, Peter did not hear Jesus’ words about loving one another. He only heard Jesus’ words about going away. He wanted to follow Jesus and be with Jesus wherever Jesus was. But Jesus told him he could not follow now. This was Jesus’ word. But Peter did not accept it. He insisted that he must follow Jesus now. He was too confident in himself. He was not trusting in Jesus’ words and humbly doing what Jesus wanted him to do. Jesus knew he would fail to follow and predicted his denial. It was not to criticize him, but to help him to realize that he should not depend on his own confidence but absolutely on God and his words alone in following Jesus.

Today we learn that Jesus gave his disciples a new command to love one another. This command starts from knowing how Jesus loved them first. When we know how much Jesus loved us first, we can truly love one another unconditionally to the end just like Jesus did to us. When we have such love among us, people around us will recognize us as true disciples of Jesus and Jesus’ love will be known to unbelieving people through us. This is Jesus’ ultimate vision and hope and passion. For this reason, Jesus served and loved his disciples to the end and he willingly gave us his very life on the cross. May Jesus’ ultimate vision come true in our small community and Uof T campus and Ryerson campus through our obedience to his new command! Amen.