

We need reminding from time-to-time, don’t we? Of course we do. Reminded of what? Simple: that we are to have love for one another. Well, maybe it’s not so simple. Love can be a very complicated thing. On this particular Sunday, which is Mother’s Day, we not only honor our mothers and celebrate the memory of those whose faith is now sight, we also take advantage of a moment to hear a timely reminder from Jesus. I sense it has been expressed through the course of this observance of worship. It most certainly has been expressed in the chorus we’ve sung. How in this world will this world know that we are Christians? The chorus acknowledged: “by our love.”

It’s true. The world will know we are Christians by our love for one another. It comes right from Jesus’ mouth, the Founder of the whole movement and the Epitome of love. In fact, according to the Gospel of John, this is the only commandment Jesus explicitly identified for His disciples, which includes you and me by the way, and insisted that it be kept. This is a “*new command*” (v. 34). What’s new about it? Love has always been around. I can’t think of a time when love wasn’t around in some form or fashion.

I got to thinking yesterday about all the songs I know that have “love” in their titles. OK you know what’s coming. Remember I listen to the oldies station. Remember all those songs from way back when? I can hear Diana Ross and The Supremes singing: “*Baby Love*”; “*Stop in the Name of Love*”; “*You Can’t Hurry Love*.” How about The O’Jays and “*Love Train*”? The Beatles sang, “*All You Need Is Love*.” One song marked Elvis Presley’s return in 1972, “*Burning Love*.” And then, “*What the World Needs Now Is Love Sweet Love*.” Let me toss in at least one country hit from my day way back when. Ronnie Millsap singing “*Pure Love*.” Long before there was a Billboard chart ranking the hits, there was love. During Jesus’ earthly life there was love. After Jesus ascended to the Father, there was love. And prior to Jesus becoming flesh, there was love. Love has always been around.

So why is this a “*new command*”? Because the people of God did not have love for one another like they should have had. This phrase, “*new command*”, appears only four times in the whole of the Bible and all of them are in John’s writings – here in John 13 and then in 1 John 1:7, 1 John 1:8, and 2 John 5. All of them are in the context of love. These words in John 13 serve as a bridge, connecting a great word on greatness – expressed in an humble action of Jesus, washing the dust off His disciples’ feet there in the Upper Room on the Thursday evening before He was crucified the next day – with another great word, one of farewell and encouragement to His disciples. On this bridge He laid it out for them. He basically said, “I’m giving you a new commandment, which really isn’t new, but it is. You, who are My disciples, love each other. You, who believe in Me, love each other. You, who are My followers, love each other. You, who are members of My church, love each other.”

This command to love one another is new because of the kind of love it is. It’s not a selfish love that says, “This is what I want. Give it to me if you love me.” There was and still is a lot of that kind of love. The kind of love to which Jesus refers is a self-sacrificial love. It’s the kind of love that was exemplified in Jesus through His public and private ministry as He formed His disciples into a community of believers. It’s also the kind of love that was exemplified in His Passion as He suffered and died for those believers and the entire world. The love we are to have for one another is of the self-sacrificial brand. It is love that is committed. It is love that doesn’t have a self-serving agenda.

Friday evening I finished reading a book that Tim Owings spoke of when he preached on March 7. Written by Salvomir Rawicz, [The Long Walk](#) is one of the most incredible stories I’ve ever read. Rawicz was a soldier in the Polish Army when the Germans invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, thus beginning World War II. In retreat from the Germans, he inadvertently crossed the Polish border into Russia, where he was captured by the Russians and charged with being a spy. After several months of brutal interrogation, he was tricked into signing a confession stating that he was a spy. He was sentenced to 25 years hard labor in Siberia. He, along with hundreds of other prisoners, was transported by train

some 3,000 miles east, then chained to a truck and forced to walk 1,000 miles north into the bitter cold of the Artic Circle where the labor prison was located.

Upon arrival he began to plot an escape. Over the next six months, he planned his get-away and during this time, six others joined him. On an appointed evening, the six escaped and headed south for India. Shortly after their journey began, they encountered a 19-year-old woman, who was also on the run. Her parents had been brutally murdered by the Russians. Eight of them joined together in a collective journey to freedom. This is a heart-wrenching true story. Some of them didn't survive the 3,000-mile trek south that takes more than a year to complete – through the bitter cold in Siberia and the Himalayas and the blistering heat and drought of the Gobi Desert.

So many truths can be drawn from The Long Walk. One thing that impressed me was that these eight people expressed love for one another. They were all different. Some were Poles. One was an American. None was selfish. It was one for all and all for one. They were committed to one another – in both life and in death. They moved beyond the sentimentality of their relationship and came to really understand what love was.

On Mother's Day, the temptation is to get too sentimental about motherhood or for that fact of the matter, the family. Maybe there is a temptation to get too sentimental about the church, forgetting that our journey, too, is a long walk and one that requires love for those who journey with us. Don't misunderstand me. There is nothing wrong with sentimentality. I think it is good to be sentimental. But take note that you and I can become so obsessed with sentimentality that it can and will have a crippling effect on what love really is.

Jimmy Tuggle sent me something he came across entitled, "What Does Love Mean?" It seems that a group of professionals posed this question to a group of 4 to 8 year olds. The answers they got were broader and deeper than anyone could have imagined. Listen to some of these.

"When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toe nails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love."
Rebecca – age 8.

"Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on shaving cologne and they go out and smell each other." Karl – age 5.

"Love is what makes you smile when you're tired." Terri – age 4.

"Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen.
Bobby" – age 7.

"If you want to learn to love better, you should start with a friend who you hate." Nikka – age 6.

"My Mommy loves me more than anybody. You don't see anyone else kissing me to sleep at night." Clare – age 6.

"Love is when Mommy sees Daddy smelly and sweaty and still says he is handsomer than Robert Redford and Brad Pitt." Chris – age 7. I've never heard that one! Have any of you other guys ever heard that? I sure haven't!

"I know my older sister loves me because she gives me all her old clothes and has to go out and buy new ones." Lauren – age 4.

"You really shouldn't say 'I love you' unless you mean it. But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget." Jessica – age 8.

And here's one of the best.

Author and lecturer Leo Buscaglia once talked about a contest he was asked to judge. The purpose of the contest was to find the most caring child. The winner was a four-year-old child whose next-door neighbor was an elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife. Upon seeing the man cry, the little boy went into the old gentleman's yard, climbed onto his lap, and just sat there. When his Mother asked him what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy said, "Nothing, I just helped him cry."

Some good answers, I think. The church is about helping each other – church members loving church members regardless. Anything less isn't church. It isn't Christian. When we have love for one another, the world will see and know that we are Christians, that we belong to Jesus Christ. So what Christian do you need to help cry? Find him or her and help him or her cry. The world will see and some of the world will turn to us for help. And what help we'll be able to give because of our love for one another.

"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" (vv. 34-35). So what does the world know about you? What does the world know about us?

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All scriptures, unless otherwise noted, are from Today's New International Version, 2001.