



ENCOURAGING RELATIONSHIPS

The Love Meal John 13:34-35

34 And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples.”

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. John 13:34 (NIV)

These words were spoken immediately before the last supper so it's quite pertinent as we come to communion that we consider them for one last time today. I remember that we started looking at this subject of loving one another after communion last week and we finish it as it were at the same place. Communion is a good place to consider these things because the table for the early Christians was not just a religious act but a love meal, or part of a love meal – an agape - where they met together, ate together, worshipped together and remembered Jesus and gave Him glory together. We read about it – or about how it was badly done in 1 Corinthians.

Communion is very much a statement of agape – love. In what way?

◆ A statement of God's love for us

Jesus said: *“Love one another as I have loved you”*. That expression of love was made perfect on the cross as Jesus died for us. Here are some familiar words from 1 John 4 from the Message to help us think about them: *This is how God showed his love for us: God sent his only Son into the world so we might live through him. This is the kind of love we are talking about—not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they've done to our relationship with God.*

As we break the bread and drink the wine tonight, we remember that we love because He first loved us.

◆ A statement of our love for God

Why do we do this? Because we love Jesus and therefore come to that place of meeting that He commanded us to be at – His table. Love gives rise to obedience and we are happy to be here because we enter into His presence.

◆ A statement of our our love for one another

“Love one another” I said last week that communion was never an individual experience. It was a command to the disciples as a group. It's always something we do with other believers – it's not personal between us and God. You can't have communion by yourself. Why? Because in our sharing in one bread, we are sharing in the life, ministry, works, values, teachings of Christ. It is an act of affirmation. We're going to do as He commanded and show our love for Him in the way we love one another.

◆ A statement of God's love to the world

35 If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples.”

We often don't see communion as witness which is a pity, because that's what it is. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11 these words: *26 This means that every time you eat this bread and drink from this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.* We often see the table as a family thing. In one sense it is as one can only be a believer to really celebrate it. But Jesus doesn't give us Baptism and The Lord's Supper as internal acts – but acts of proclamation. We proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. It speaks to everyone of what we believe. If anything is God given, God means to use it to His glory in ways only He can. I led the funeral of someone on Friday who had heard the gospel before – but the Holy Spirit

convicted him when he was invited to communion. Why? Because this is the Lord's table and we expect Him to be present at His table! And this man encountered Christ.

Similarly if as God's people we are acting in a way that honours Christ – that our desire to express our love of Him together in this form of worship – then if our love for one another is as genuine as our love for Him, then our lives together will speak the same message as this table. The table speaks of a God who loved us so much. It speaks us of love in action as Jesus' blood is shed. It speaks of love in action as we express our love to Him in worship.

And it's those values that we should take from this table tonight. We should live for one another as Jesus has loved us. As people see the way we treat one another that speaks more words than we can ever express.

It's an area where we are conscious that we often fall short in; isn't it? We desire to express our love for God and that's why it is a joy to worship our Saviour around His table. But it's not complete until we recognise that communion is not an act between me and God but a community act between Jesus and His people. If our love for one another isn't a reflection of our love for Him, let alone His for us, then we are falling short of the command of Jesus.

34 And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples."

Let's use the opportunity this evening to come in repentance – to say sorry for the times our lives, particularly our lives together have not reflected His love for us, and covenant together with Him as we come around the table to make our lives together reflect His love with the help and power of the Holy Spirit.

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