

# Love One Another

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[ 0 : 00 ] Okay, we're going to take a look at the second theme of what we've entitled, Passing Thoughts. And I guess kind of it's the foundational truths that I want, that you want as well for the congregation as you enter a new chapter.

And I want for the new church in Leith. And we hope every church looks for and has. And last week you were looking at loving God, and today we're looking at loving one another as the next step in our last week, next week by God's grace, we'll look at loving the lost.

So you go into social media, there's lots of different memes, isn't there? Lots of different things that people put on social media. And some of the really common ones are things like, life's better when you don't care what other people think.

You quite often get that on memes, don't you, people that are fed up. They may be being treated badly. Another one is distance is my new answer in 2024. I no longer react.

I no longer argue. I simply withdraw. That's a common one as well, isn't it? They just look after yourself. Look after number one. It doesn't matter what other people are doing, or just involve yourself with people who are great and really are going to build you up.

[ 1 : 16 ] So, avoid the complications of people. Don't get involved in people's lives, they're just a mess. Just keep yourself from that hassle.

However, I did read a good one actually, and I was researching for the sermon. A bad day with a bald guy is better than a good day with a man bun. So, I thought, particularly good, I like that one. Sorry for any guys with men buns. Nothing personal. So, but it would be interesting, wouldn't it, to know what Jesus would put on a social media meme.

Forgive 70 times 7. Lay down your life for your friends. Serve one another in love, it would be his memes.

Or the one from our verse today, love one another as I have loved you. Boom! I said, sendry, and it's not the kind of meme that we see in people's lives, and in our own lives if we're absolutely honest, so much of the time.

[ 2 : 25 ] But this is the commandment. The commandment, I give you a new commandment that you love one another just as I have loved you.

Verse 34 of the passage we read. It's the commandment because it is the absolute distinguishing mark of you as a Christian and of me as a Christian.

That's what Jesus says. He says, by this all people will know that you're my disciples. That's what He says. That's what He focuses on. And it's the mark of being a Christian.

What do you think the mark of being a Christian is? What's your mark in the world? What is it that you're leaving on people's minds and hearts when you meet up with them and when they get to know you?

That is the distinguishing mark that Jesus wants you to have about being a Christian. By this all people will know that you're my disciples as I have loved you.

[ 3 : 22 ] Love one another. Short verse, short sentence, He says it three times. That always means it's very important when He repeats. If Jesus repeats Himself, then it's not because He's got dementia.

It's because He knows exactly that this is what is important. New commandment that you love one another, just as I've loved you, that you also love one another.

Second time. By this all men will know you're my disciples. If you have love for one another, if you didn't hear it the first two times, if you love one another, that's a third time. He says it three times to them.

Three times to us in His living words because it's so significant. I have loved you. Now you shrug your shoulders today and you say, here we go again, He's talking about love.

It's love. It's just love. It's easy. It's easy stuff, isn't it? This is impossible. This is not just love.

[ 4 : 20 ] Remember it's in the context of Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial which he prophesies here. Jesus is giving, we can never shrug our shoulders at this truth.

We can never shrug our shoulders and say, I've gone beyond that. That's kindergarten Christianity. I've gone beyond it. We can't do that because this contains the deepest theological truth that is in the Bible.

Love one another as I have loved you. It's divinity breaking in to our existence. That's what it is. As I have loved you, He says, it's the deepest of all truth that we need to do.

You need to wrestle with it. If you sit back today and say, well, this is for beginners, please reconsider and channel the message from God's Word into your own heart.

Because you should be saying this is impossible. You should be on your knees saying, I have no idea how to do this at one level anyway.

[ 5 : 32 ] But no, stay there because it's not a council of despair. There's great truth in this. But you see, natural love, which we all have and we all share, which is great, and we thank God for it, natural love, even though we tend to distort the gift of God's love.

But naturally what we find in our lives, what is it we do? Naturally we love people who are like us, people who like you, you'll love.

We love people who we want to be with, who want to be with you. That's the kind of people we love. People who are beautiful, people who are successful, people who are middle class, people who are resourced, who are the same color, the same politics, the same ethnicity, who love you.

But that's the kind of people naturally we're drawn to in life. So often, often we love those who we deem worthy of our love.

They've earned our love, and we've assumed our own worthiness of being loved because that's much easier, isn't it?

[ 6 : 39 ] We assume people will love us because we're worthy of it, and we'll give our love to those who are worthy of it. And maybe it's very best in human terms, it can be completely, hugely sacrificial.

And sometimes at a human level, look a lot greater than Christian love. But even then, in the most marvelous of circumstances where it seems a glorious love, humanly speaking, if the motive doesn't recognize God's mercy in their lives and God's glory as their motives, then it's a weaker love and a lesser love.

Now, that's what natural love sees. And in the church, well, isn't church one of the greatest battlegrounds for the outworking of this particular command?

Love one another as I've loved you. Strangely but true, the church, St. Columbus, any church, if you're a visitor, the church you belong to, or the church that maybe is in the figment of your imagination.

But church is one of the great battlegrounds for the outworking of this command, isn't it? Because people are not like Jesus. Ah, it's easy, I love Jesus, He's perfect, He's God, He's God, the divine Son.

[ 7 : 57 ] But people aren't like that, I'm not like that, you're not like that. And there may be many, many situations where you can absolutely find fault with Christians and with the church and with the institution for sure, and it may be a fair-tilde ground for walking away.

It may be entirely justifiable from a human point of view, see, these are a bunch of bams and we can walk away from them.

And there may be perfectly justifiable reason because the church is full of broken sinners, that's why.

And it's the curse of expectations, isn't it, in church? The curse of Christian expectations. It's a terrible thing because we have such high expectations in our marriages among our friends of the preacher, of other Christians, of the leadership in the church.

We have high expectations because they're Christians, because they're gifted. So subtle yet, it's so subtle, but yet so often that expectation that we have on others of the church and of the behavior of others and the way Christians should be and churches should be, we deflect that from ourselves.

[ 9 : 16 ] And I'm not saying we shouldn't have an expectation of others, but it must come with the recognition of the great expectation on ourselves.

In other words, where we allow the light of Jesus Christ first to shine into our own hearts or we self-justify our lives by looking at the failings in others and the failure to live up to the...

Our expectations, let alone Jesus, very often we take Jesus place, don't we? And we think that really it's our expectations that are more important.

And in church, I guess, I mean, lots of reasons. Everyone thinks God's on their side. I think God's on my side. You think God's on your side. We think what we think because we think in Christ's name.

We're really caring about Christ and His gospel. And that may be true. But that will impact how we consider, think of, treat, act with one another.

[ 10 : 17 ] But the other extreme in church, there's that kind of judgmental spirit that sometimes comes into our... And sometimes justifiably, I'm not saying...

I'm not giving an excuse here for bad behavior. We completely justify, well, I'm talking about the importance of looking at our own hearts, which we kind of looked at last week. But the other extreme in churches that makes it difficult to love as I have loved you, as Christ says, is for our need for approval.

We all need approval. We all want to belong. And that quite often means being nice because it's easier to be nice.

But there can therefore be no real depth, no reality, no faithful wounds of a friend, no wrestling with the honor or the glory of God in our lives or in the lives of others, and therefore no vulnerability.

And a great fear of being known. That's one of the greatest challenges of loving one another is basically the fear of being known. We're known by Christ to the very core of our being, and He causes us to be known of one another.

[ 11 : 35 ] But the reality of that therefore means our desire simply to be nice and not be vulnerable and not be exposed means that we can be bland and have a shallow, shadowy existence as a church.

These are some of the dangers that I've picked out. I'm sure there's many more, and many more related to my own heart. But we're called to love Christians as Christ loves us.

And I just want to focus for a few minutes on the church family, obviously St. Columbus, but again, if you're visiting whatever church family you belong to, I know there's a broader emphasis to this command.

There's a broader emphasis against sectarianism, against theological snobbery, denominational pride, not associating with others because they think differently from me theologically, or they're not the same.

They don't worship in the same way. My test has always been, well, I think maybe more so as I've got older, am I going to spend eternity with these people?

[ 12 : 50 ] Do they love Jesus? That's good enough. It doesn't mean we're all the same. It doesn't mean we agree with one another and everything. It doesn't mean we're going to partner in every gospel venture, but it means we bless one another and we love one another.

And we don't criticize and condemn them because they're slightly different from us. That's part of the wider picture, which I'm not going to start getting rambling on about. But let's look at, for ourselves, Christ's church.

Christ's love, brother. We don't have time to spend a great deal of focus on going into great depth here. I hope you will yourselves, and I hope it's a lifelong process for us.

But you remember, take time to look at Philippians 2, which speaks so beautifully about the love of Christ who considered others before himself.

He considered others before himself. That's the work of Christ as He comes and lives His life. Now, I was thinking walking in this morning about Jesus, 30 years.

[ 13 : 58 ] 30 years, we don't know anything apart from a couple of little details about His birth and His teenage year.

But nothing, nothing but that 30 years before that prepared Him for His public ministry, His death, His crucifixion and resurrection. He was considering others before himself.

Our needs, your needs before His own. That's what He was doing long before He was even born. He made, Philippians 2 tells us He made Himself nothing, nothing.

The one who created the world from nothing becomes nothing on our behalf in the incarnation and His life on the cross, obedient to death, the infinite cost that we will never understand that sets us free.

He made Himself nothing. We have nothing to offer, nothing whatsoever to offer to the living God for our salvation and for our hope.

[ 15 : 05 ] He made Himself nothing in order to give us everything, Jesus Christ. And our great battle is that it's always all about me.

And that's the greatest fight that we wrestle against, that it's about me rather than about this Christ who gave Himself up for me and His grace, His free redeeming grace for us.

Now there are approximately 49 one another's in the New Testament that are recorded for us, which really are just an outworking of this command to love one another as I have loved you.

They express what it looks like for us to live like Christ, because it expresses what Christ, how Christ loves you in your Christian life.

Think of some of them. Build one another up, accept one another, care for one another, bear one another's burdens, forgive, be patient, speak the truth in love, be kind and compassionate, submit, teach, comfort, encourage, example, do good works for one another.

[ 16 : 24 ] Be hospitable, that is the love of people you've not met before, the love of strangers. That's what hospitality means biblically. It's broader than that.

Use your gifts for one another, pray for one another. All of these things, that's how Christ lives for you. That's how Christ loves you in all of these ways. Look up the one another's.

When I left Roscain, my first charge, I'd done a series on the one another's interestingly, and a lady in the congregation, what's the word?

She cross-stitched. Is it? Cross-stitched. She cross-stitched them all. Must have taken her days, days.

I've got them down, well, I've taken it off the wall, but it was down the wall in the office. I've remembered it. I've kept it, because the greatest gift I could have been given, the one another's cross-stitched.

[ 17 : 22 ] And it reminds us, it doesn't just say, this is a moral way, this is how you should live. It says, this is how Christ loves me. This is how I should love one another.

And of course, there's a couple of negative ones as well. Don't lie to one another, pass judgment on one another, bite and devour one another, gossip against one another, provoke one another, envy, slander, grumble.

Ding, ding. I recognize some of these things in me, do you? I'm sure you do. Because naturally that's what we battle with. And naturally that's what we're asked to change in our hearts.

And we can't do it without the living power of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and the love of Christ and recognizing what Christ has done for us. That's what Coral preached here.

That's what I've preached here for 22 years. And that is the core of who we are. Love God and love one another and love the lost. That's what we preach.

[ 18 : 22 ] There's infinite depth. If you think there's not infinite depth there, you're on a different track. And I'm telling you, get off it and get back on this track.

This is the only track there is. And the great thing for us as Christians is we have the gift of the Holy Spirit. He says, as I have loved you, and the presumption for us is, as we recognize this, because He's speaking to His disciples, is that we have recognized that.

We've recognized the way He's loved us, infinitely, freely, fully. It's not because we're better than anyone else or because we can earn it.

And we've repented of trying to do things on our own and we've come to Jesus Christ and we've accepted the truth. We've confessed and we follow Him. Can I just have a quick aside?

Have you done that? Do you recognize? There's no other way. Jesus Christ says, confess your sins, repent and follow me.

[ 19 : 29 ] That's what the disciples did, even in all their failure and their falling. It truly is the greatest reality that you'll ever seek and look for and find in your life.

So we have the gift as Christians of the Holy Spirit which brought life to us and it brings the divine presence into our lives so that we can be one with one another.

You really need to read John 13, yeah, John 13 through to 17 to fully unpack what he says in this verse, but loving one another.

It's all there. Magnificent stuff. Go home and take time to read these four chapters. Because as Christians, you can't sit here this morning and I can't sit here and say, I have excuses for not loving. You can't say, well, you know, they're really, they really are objectionable people. We can't say that. I really do try my best, but I'm doing my best, but I can't do it.

[ 20 : 26 ] You can't say that about anything in the Christian life because we've been gifted the divine presence so that we can do His will. I'm just an addict to sin.

Get over it. Grow up. You've got the Holy Spirit. We can't use that. I'm not saying we're not going to sin, but I say, don't use it as an excuse. Don't stay away saying, oh, I just can't really, with the poor me and all that goes with that.

We have no excuses. We're called to be because we are in Christ beautiful and whole and redeemed and bought back and you can't continue as a Christian doing this in a solo act.

It's a community task. They do say about what it takes a village to bring up a child or something like that. I don't know what this phrase is, but there's a lot of truth in it. It takes a community to be a Christian.

You can't be a Christian on your own, really, because there's this whole massive new commandment that we're called to outwork. It's not just riding solo away into the sunset.

[ 21 : 36 ] I love Jesus. To hell with everyone else. It doesn't work that way because we're called to be in community because we're riding towards a great community, a great community of believers for eternity.

And the call is for transformation. So your testimony, your testimony in mind is never, oh, God did this for me 20 years ago. He saved me. He had a daily, weekly transformation.

Oh, yes, what I needed to repent of last week. It's not just what Christ has done, it's what Christ is doing. It's what I'm learning.

It's how I'm changing through Him and in Him. I respond differently to people in the church now than I did 20 years ago. Is that what you can say? I would have acted as a young Christian very differently to this difficult situation with other Christians than I am now.

See, what's not of first importance is being polite and moral and church going and Bible reading and hardworking and friendly.

[ 22 : 40 ] It's loving one another the way Jesus loves us. It's radical, transformational, impossibly great, and we need the Holy Spirit because what we are here.

This is, you know, it's very common in films now, film trilogies or film series to have a prequel. Well, this is the prequel of heaven. That's what it's supposed to be.

The church is not laughable that the church is supposed to be the prequel of heaven. Sometimes it's more like hell and it's supposed to be like heaven because of the way we act.

It's a prequel of heaven, our destination. This is how we make Jesus famous. I'll say maybe more about that in a sense next week.

By this all people will know that you're mid. It's that all people will know. So we have to work out somehow both how to love Jesus His way and then how to share that in a way that all people can see it.

[ 23 : 42 ] That's what we're called to do and that's what we're to recognize. That's how we'll make Jesus famous. So lastly, briefly, this command for sins is just in applying it again.

Just recognizing it. First of all, it's impossibility. That's the first great, that's the great step in recognizing it's possible. If you're part of sins, if you're a member of sins, but you've never seen that the love you're called to show others, love your call to show others can't be done naturally.

It is more than just a natural love. If you don't and haven't ever seen that this love and this change in your heart needs prayer and transformation and grace, then do take a serious look at your heart and at the gospel message.

It might be nice, but it's not discipleship. Christ's way. And just simply ask Christ to show you His diagnosis of your heart and also His great redemption and His great calling on your life to love one another as He has loved you.

Because it clearly is sacrificial, isn't it? We've got a reputation for hospitality in St. Columbus and that's great. It's a wonderful thing.

[ 25 : 08 ] It's part of what I really love about this church. But it's tough, isn't it? Love of a stranger, because that's what it means as we said earlier, primarily.

Love of someone you're not naturally connected with or connected to. It means opening your hearts and opening your homes and opening your gifts to others. But it's such a powerful witness to the gospel message in every way, the sacrificiality of it.

And it does take time and inspired prayer and action. But I'm calling you to keep it going, to develop it, to mature it, to spread it. If you're married, share that calling with your partner.

Love them, obviously. Love one another, that's the first calling. But then together, love the church. Love St. Columbus and develop one another externally of each other to do that.

And I say, if you have families, they can become all-consuming, can't they? And there's a rightful focus and primacy of the family.

[ 26 : 16 ] But also, take your family into this community and teach your children. From a very early age, this amazing reality of loving one another as I've loved you, show them how it's done.

Don't separate them from it, but show them how it's done. And just engulf yourself within the family of the church as well, involving them, teaching them about this love.

As individuals, be brothers and sisters in the church family. Give your heart to it. Give your heart to being part of this church family with all the difficulty and the challenge of that.

And you know, there's another side to that. You know, the great danger of preaching is always, na-na-na-na-na. Nag, nag, nag. Do, do, change, change, change.

And there's, oh, there is that element to grace working in us, transforming us. But there is always another side to love, isn't it? It's not just loving and taking that responsibility.

[ 27 : 25 ] The other side, this is maybe underplayed and underspoken. You need to allow yourself to be loved. Now, that can be very, that's a hard side of it.

You need to allow yourself to be loved. You need to allow the walls of your individuality to be broken down, to be vulnerable, to belong.

And that can be tough to be loved by people that you're not naturally attracted to or who have maybe, with whom you've had difficulties in the past.

It's tremendously self-sacrificing to allow your heart to be open. Why?

Because it will undoubtedly be broken. Undoubtedly be broken. There's no doubt that your heart will be broken as you serve in this way.

[ 28 : 28 ] But along with that vulnerability, must be a sense of self-examining about what it might be, oh God forbid, what it might be in my heart that makes me unlovable.

That's part of it too. When we find difficulties, intentions and opposition, our tendency is to look at others always and find the area of thought which may be absolutely real and genuine and we'll need dealt with.

But there's a self-examination that's involved in this as well. It says, well, what makes me ugly here? What makes other people be repelled from me and it may be that that is part of this great sacrificial task.

So it's sacrificial. It's impossible. It's an unnatural unity as we've said and we recognize that. What we want in St. Columbus because it comes from Galatians 3, 28 and 29, there's neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female and all the divisions where one in Christ is, it takes time and effort to build this unnatural unity which is not human-based.

We have to come out sometimes of our racial, class, sex, cultural, educational, social, sexuality, ecclesiastical bubbles and break them old of what we find easy to be alongside.

[ 30 : 11 ] Now I am old now, as you well know, 60, I'm very old but I have lived through division in the church for ten years.

Deep, deep division in the free church from 1990 to the year 2000 as a minister. And it's the ugliest thing I've ever experienced and I was part of it.

I was part of the ugliness. But it's undoubtedly what was the foundation of the renewal of the work in St. C's.

It was birthed out of that blackness which is why I will never go back to it. By God's grace He changed us and renewed us and gave us a different focus.

It's an unnatural unity. We need to work towards it because division in the church is the ugliest division in the world. You know that and we fight against it.

[ 31 : 14 ] It's self-forgetful. Coming to it, I'm nearly finished. It's self-forgetful. So it's not consumerist. It's not about what's suiting me. Now I know that there will be change from February onwards, that has to be.

It's a new chapter. It's got to be. It wouldn't be right if there wasn't change. Some of the changes are going to be what you want and you look for. Some of them you might not like.

But there's not radical change. There's not a revolution. It's just evolution. It's progression. That's how it should be. But no one and nothing is ever everyone's cup of tea in a church.

Ever think that? If you ever think that, the fact that you're in the church is, and me in the church, is absolute proof that it can never be.

We're called to respond by putting the gospel, grace, and other people first. That's the battle you have to face. And you can't sit today and say, this is an easy work and there's no challenge here.

[ 32 : 19 ] This is the major challenge that every one of us faces, to be committed to a church family, get 100% behind it through all the difficulties and the battles and the struggles and the failings of others and ourselves, and let Christ mold us through it.

It's self-forgetful. It's visionary. Second and last thing, see the church as a plowed field of forgiveness. That's the biggest challenge.

Every time we rage and gossip and reject, think of Christ. Think of His forgiveness. Think of Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial. And think of His love.

And lastly, remember that this loving one another as Christ loved you is not just about the hour we're together. It's that, but it's much, much more than that.

It's about committing in love to one another as people through big church, small church, all relatives speaking through the city groups, through families, through individuals coming together because that is...

[ 33 : 27 ] And doing that with your non-Christian friends is part of it. Draw the all people into this community to experience true divine love in action.

That is how people will know we're disciples. That's where it starts. That's what it's about. It's about loving in such a way with your non-Christian friends coming in around your Christian community to see that they love one another, that we love one another just as Christ has loved us.

Amen. Father, help us to live and love the way you want us to. And we thank you that we can end this service with the Lord's Supper, which is that great physical and tangible reminder to us of your provision for us, the nourishment of life, spiritual life given to us through the death of Jesus on the cross.

Remind us of that. Fill us with that hope. Help us to rejoice in it. Help us to see more clearly, descend into our hearts in the power of the Holy Spirit in the way that you've never done before, among us as we celebrate the Lord's Supper.

And to teach us your way, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.