John 13:34-35 34“A new commandment I give you: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, so also you are to love one another. 35By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

It is always an exciting day when you have a Confirmand before you. And I don’t just mean a young teen confirmand like we have today, I mean any confirmand, anyone who has taken and gone through our catechism and learned the very basics of the Christian faith. So whether young or older, it is always exciting to have a confirmand before you because it means that person has heard and has come to confess that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Savior.

You realize that is the very purpose of our Confirmation process. Our catechism says, in a section that introduces and speaks of Luther, just what the purpose was when Luther determined to write the Catechism. It says, *“Luther often showed his deep concern for the Christian training of young people…When Luther found that many pastors and parents did not know how to instruct children in the main teachings of the Bible, he wrote the Small Catechism. Luther’s chief purpose in writing the Catechism was to lead children to know and believe that the only way of salvation is by faith in Jesus…The Lutheran Church has always considered the catechism the very least that every Christian should know about Bible teachings.”*

I have always enjoyed that last line and after I read it the very first time I knew right then and there that everyone who would want to be a member of this church would be going through the Catechism. If we say it is the very least we should know, then how can we even consider “condensing” the least when it comes down to adults and others who come to learn from us? Catechism and confirmation are important! Important for the individual and important for the Church as the very standard of knowledge for a Lutheran believer.

Let’s contemplate this marvel of our Savior and this practice of confirmation under the theme: **YOU ARE MY DISCIPLE.**

The context of the words before us is the night of Maundy Thursday. The disciples and Jesus had gathered together in the large upper room that had been furnished them and that Peter and John had earlier gone to so that they might prepare the Passover meal. Jesus has just finished washing the disciples’ feet and in that process had a number of times emphasized that one of them was going to betray him. Mind you, this warning was a deeper warning than the one to follow, the one given to Peter. Peter too, was warned that he would deny Jesus but even at this point Jesus knew the difference between what Peter would do and what Judas would do. Peter would cling to faith but Judas’ betrayal was one that involved unbelief. Judas rejected Jesus as the Christ and the resulting grief of Judas, once he grasped what he had done, would cause him to take his own life.

These words then occur at the very beginning of the Passover meal when Jesus hands the bread dipped in the dish to Judas and Judas, directed by Satan, leaves the meal in anger and indignity. It is then that Jesus speaks the words of our text. Words that point to what is coming. His glorification. In other words, Jesus is pointing to the whole period of the Passion, his arrest, suffering, crucifixion, death and burial. But just as important, Jesus is pointing to his resurrection, to the fact that He will die and rise again in total and awesome glory. Jesus had no doubts about the outcome of what was coming. He would be glorified and the world would be saved from sin, death and the devil.

It is in this context that Jesus speaks the words before us. I think the most important words are those directed to the disciples. Yes, the words concerning love. Jesus gives them what he calls a **“new command.”** It is not new in the Bible but it is something new for the disciples to contemplate and practice among themselves. They will need to do this because the next few days, okay, the next few months, years, and decades will be such that they will need the support and help of each other to get through. By the way, it is clear that during this time Peter, who denied, went to be with his brothers and was found among them on Easter night. But Judas, he stayed away from his brothers and in despair, not having their love to support him, took his own life. That is the difference between one who believes and one who does not. The believer sticks with his fellow believers…that is one of the purposes of church. To help us through the rough times and give us the love and support we need to get through this great tribulation of life. Don’t tell me church is not important!

What is this command of Jesus? (Get the whole thing now. I say that because many seem to take the first few words, twist them as they see fit and thus pollute this wonderful command of Jesus.) He says, **“Love one another. Just as I have loved you, so you are to love one another.”** Notice how Jesus does not let the idea and practice of love up to us and what we decide it means, but tells us clearly it is to be a love that is modeled completely on his example and practice of love.

If you want to grasp just what was being spoke of here then I would encourage you to go and read the entire book of 1 John. You could say that this book is about love, about the love of Jesus and then about how you and I are going to practice that love. The letter is written by the Apostle John, of course under verbal inspiration so it is the Word of God. It is written some 60 to 65 years after our text and clearly you can see how these words of Jesus influence John and all the disciples of Jesus. Let me give some highlights from that book.

Clearly 1 John is about believing in Jesus, grasping that Jesus is our Savior from sin and then putting that faith into practice. The first chapter is about how Jesus is the Word of life that lights up the world and then how we are to walk in that light. In chapter two we actually find John emphasizing “loving one another” and what is interesting is that in verse 7 he tells us **“I am not writing a new command but an old one.”** In other words, for the past 60-65 years the disciples have been doing just what Jesus said…Loving one another.

Chapter 4 reminds us: **“Dear friends, let us love one another, because love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. The one who does not love has not known God, because God is love. This is how God’s love for us was revealed: God sent his only-begotten Son into the world so that we may live through him. This is love; not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.“** A few verse later we hear this again: **“We love because he first loved us. If anyone say, “I love God,” but hates his brother, he is a liar. For how can anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, love God, whom he has not seen? This then is the command we have from him: The one who loves God should also love his brother.”**

There is no doubt as to what we are being commanded by Jesus when you sit down and read 1 John. It is to be the same love that Jesus had. You know, Jesus who condemned sin, called for repentance and offered the forgiveness of sins in what He would do. But remember Jesus also made forgiveness contingent upon faith, absolute trust that what He is and did and said is the heart of eternal life and salvation. Remember, there were two thieves on the cross. One came to faith and was saved…the other, I don’t think it has been good for him. Go back to Judas and Peter. It is clear that Peter believed and was forgiven, even restored as an Apostle and preacher of Jesus. Judas, it is clear ended up in hell. Saul, because of Jesus become Paul, apostle extraordinaire but Caiaphas and Annas, we have no record of their faith or conversion and thus it is not good for them.

Why do I point these things out? Because it is clear that God does not just, in a blanket way, forgive every person their sins. The key is faith. The key is believing in Jesus and what He is about. The key is not to have a lip service faith, not just to say you believe but finally and ultimately to practice that faith or as our text encourages: **“To love one another as Jesus has loved us.”** That means we follow and believe the entire Word of God!

Again, 1 John: **“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar, and his Word is not in us.”** You cannot embrace sin, wallow in sin, cling to sin or even change what God has declared to be sin and still claim to be faithful and true to Jesus. Faith motivated by the love God has poured upon you in Jesus, will and does practice love as Jesus commands, as Jesus gave us in his Word.

Jesus also says as he gives this command: **“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”** Your faith will be evident because of your love. Your confidence in Jesus will shine forth as you let the light of Jesus shine out of you, His Way! In other words, very simply, you become a sharer of Jesus, a disciple of Jesus as you practice his love and the world sees that you do.

By the way, our confirmand for this morning chose a great passage as her Confirmation verse. I encourage every kid to pick a verse that they would like to serve as their motto of faith, a passage that they want to be their guide and help in life. Payton chose James 1:14. It says, **“So, for the one who knows the right thing to do and doesn’t do it, this is a sin.”** You might be more familiar with it from the NIV84: **“Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.”**

If is a great passage. It tells me that Payton is concerned with doing things right. I have no doubt this drive to do things right in her life comes from her faith in Jesus. She understands what Jesus has done for her. She understands the gift of eternal life and salvation, the promise of heaven that is hers because Jesus won the victory for her. Because of this love found in Jesus, she wants to do what is right. What she did was picked a passage that gives the same sanctification direction that Jesus and 1 John do, only in Jame’s unique style. Jesus and John say**: “Love one another. Just as I have loved you, so also you are to love one another.”** James puts it this way: **“Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.”** We are to be the example of Jesus. We are to strive for what is right and good and just, because Jesus did that for us. We have sin because we will fail to be holy and perfect like Jesus, but that’s where we go back and renew ourselves in the love of Jesus and in his atoning sacrifice for our sins. Don’t you just love how God’s Word meshes and just fits together in everything?

This love tells us if you are a disciple? It is easy to tell just by watching your life. It is not about how you dress or where you live. It is about the light of Jesus shining in your life. It is about how you show love and care, compassion and grace to your fellow human being. You have taken care to follow this wonderful and important command of Jesus.

Payton, may our Lord continue to bless you with a strong faith and always that desire to serve him by doing what is right. For all the rest of us: May our Lord bless you with a strong faith and always that desire to serve Him by doing what is right. Amen.