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This New Commandment, the Love commandment, from the Gospel of John is given as part of the Last Supper. New Testament scholars call it the farewell discourse. All four gospels have a farewell discourse, yet the other three cover the subject in a few short verses. John, however, devotes 5 chapters, 25% of his entire Gospel to this one event. It obviously holds great importance for him.

The placement of this event in his gospel is also interesting. It is sandwiched between two critical moments. Just before this passage Judas leaves the disciples in order to go and carry out his betrayal of Jesus. Just after the passage, Peter proclaims to Jesus that he would never, ever, under any circumstance reject Jesus and would be willing to lay down his own life for him. Jesus then predicts that Peter will in fact deny him three times before the morning.

It is here between the betrayal and denial that Jesus chooses to speak about love. He addresses the disciples with a certain sense of intimacy that sets apart this special moment with them. “Little children”, he says to these grown men, “listen to me now, I am getting ready to go to a place where you cannot come. It is important to have this time together right now.

Most of us have experienced something similar...a final conversation with someone we love who knew that he or she would not be with us much longer. I had just that powerful moment with my dear friend Carol in North Carolina. It is truly a sacred time. It is in this same way Jesus wants his friends to remember the words he speaks to them in his last moments alone with them.

Jesus foregoes his usual way of speaking with parables and stories and simply decides to give them an order! I give you a new commandment, he says so simply, “that you love one another.” That is it.

As one modern scholar has said, “This command is simple enough for a toddler to memorize and appreciate, and it is profound enough that mature believers are repeatedly embarrassed at how poorly they comprehend it and put it into practice.”

Simply LOVE....keep your focus on one thing...yet through the centuries since his parting conversation with his friends we (us Christians) have found so many other ways to identify and welcome those who we think should belong”

Jesus never talked about the importance of the Bible or any creed for that matter. The New Testament would not even be written until 2 generations after Jesus’ death and the Nicene

Creed would be argued out in some very combative ways over the next 330 years. The Bible and the creeds have become very important to human beings over the years, but the one thing most important to Jesus keeps getting lost amongst the rules we make to live by

What Jesus wanted us to know, apparently, was that although people would fight wars over who held correct beliefs, this was not Jesus' primary concern...LOVE simply love. Jesus' way was the way of little children..."Little children, he said, I give you a new commandment, that you love one another....This command is not about what you believe, it is about how you live.

One of my favorite theologians to read is Karen Armstrong. In her autobiographical work, *The Spiral Staircase*, she notes that in most religious traditions, faith is not about belief, but about practice. "Religion," Armstrong writes, "is not about having to believe or accept difficult propositions; instead, religion is about doing things that change you."

(In one of his sermons, friend and colleague, Gary Jones shared a wonderful story from "Out of Africa" by Isak Dinesen. It was a story about Kitau...he came seeking employment as a domestic in her home...She hired him but was surprised after three months when he came and ask for a recommendation to Sheik Ali bin Salim, a Muslim who lived in a nearby town. Dinesen offered to raise Kitau's pay in order for him to stay, but money was not his interest. He had decided to become either Christian or Muslim...His purpose for working for Dinesen was to see and experience up close the way a Christian lived. Now he wanted to go and observe the same in a Muslim home...then he would decide...The author remembers wishing Kitau had told her this before he came to live with her.

You have a new command, that you love one another.....will others see that love in you?