

Lord Jesus, help us to love one another beyond our love for ourselves with a self-sacrificing love as You have loved us. Make us rich in all good works, and teach us how best to help those who are in need of Your love and assistance through us. Cause us to grow more and more like You, our Good Samaritan, identifying and fulfilling the many needs You place before us in the lives of one another, for the sake of Your great love to us all. Amen.

[Jesus said:] A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

In Christ Jesus, whose love for all people knows no limits and calls us to lives of unselfish love toward all as well, dear fellow redeemed:

There are many marks of the Church of Christ Jesus our Lord. Believers in Him are recognized in and by the world in several ways: We gather where His Word is faithfully preached and the sacraments are properly administered. We have divinely called shepherds, or pastors who are responsible for nourishing and protecting us spiritually. We worship the God of our salvation through such things as prayer, public praise and thanksgiving. We live under the cross, enduring pain, loss and persecution for confessing Jesus to be the Savior of the world. Jesus mentions one other in our text as a result of His great love at work in our lives, we love one another. **Christ's Love Shown in Our Lives Bears Witness to His Love.**

I

The words of our text were spoken by our Lord while still in the upper room on the night He was betrayed. It was right after Judas left to fulfill his agreed upon betrayal. Jesus instructed those who remained with Him: "By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Judas walked out loving himself above others, even the Lord Jesus.

One wonders what went through Judas' mind shortly before this when Jesus washed His disciples feet, even Judas' feet and then said this: "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you." What a loving act of selfless service Jesus performed! But this mark of Jesus' disciples could not be observed in Judas. He was not one of Jesus' true disciples, but was a

hypocrite and Jesus knew it. It was to loveless Judas that the morsel of bread was given by Jesus identifying him as the betrayer.

Now the hypocritical self-service of Judas was a blatant demonstration of not being a real disciple of Jesus. But it does not take much for us who are truly His disciples to conclude when we do acts or say words of love toward another and are seen by others that this somehow contributes to our position as a true disciple. Peter would boast after this that even though all the others would fall away because of Jesus' arrest and execution, he would not. Jesus would warn him about his impending denial. However, Peter was not the only disciple of Jesus who struggled with such self-love, Luke informs us that after Jesus instituted His supper a dispute arose among them all vying for the position of being considered the greatest disciple.

How are you doing with denying self and showing forth that self-sacrificing love for one another? Sadly, if you are like me, you often wonder how you could be seen as one of Jesus' disciples because of your many self-serving sins in which your love for one another can hardly be observed. John reiterates this mark of Jesus' Church when he writes in his first letter: "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers."

This passing from death to life, however, is not a result of our work but the work of our Lord alone for and in and through us. John would go on to observe: "By this we know love, that [Christ] laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers." And again: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God." And then: "We love because He first loved us."

This is the mystery of the loving acts of the Good Samaritan in our Gospel lesson. Not only did he stop to serve neighbor when others passed by, but this neighbor was his enemy. Not only did he give the man first aid, but took him to the inn to be cared for. Not only did he pay for his care in advance but promised to come back and pay any additional costs his care would require. Who among us see ourselves in these selfless acts of service? - None of us. There is only one true Good Samaritan and that is Jesus our Lord. So it is true, He loved us first with the result that we now get to love one another.

II

It is this love, which Christ has shown us and all people by willingly, yes, even joyfully, loving us despite the fact that we are sinners, His enemies, to the point of sacrificing Himself unto death for us all. This sacrifice was required if we were to be saved. Here is

where Jesus even went beyond the example left by the Good Samaritan. Jesus did not just help us to recover, He took our place in His suffering and death, so that we might live. This is now placed before us as the basis of that new command that we now love one another as He has loved us.

This is not the first time Jesus spoke this way however. You will remember from His sermon on the mount He taught this: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. ... For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?" Jesus has made known to us by His words and His actions the love of the heavenly Father toward us. So that having been made His children in this world we too should love even our enemies and be willing to sacrifice for them.

Look around you at your many neighbors. Who is the one hurting? Who is the one who is lonely? Who is the one that is hungry, thirsty, naked, sick or in prison? You may not have to look too far, your needy neighbors may be right under your same roof and perhaps they have done something, which has offended you, making themselves your enemy. Your calling in life is to love one another with the same kind of love you have been shown from heaven.

You are no doubt familiar with the print of the altar painting from the city church in Wittenberg where Luther lived and worked for most of his career. It is hanging on the wall back by the mailboxes right now. It pictures preaching, baptism, holy communion and absolution. These activities, or marks of Jesus' Church take place in church buildings like this one throughout the world. But Christ's Church is to be seen throughout the week as well wherever His believers live, work, play and relax. The picture of Jesus washing the disciples feet is in the narthex representing that mark of the Church most visible in and by the world as we daily interact with our many neighbors.

As we Christians go about serving neighbor in their various needs, the love of Christ Jesus our Lord for us poor sinners is made manifest in the love produced by and through our hands and lips right where our neighbors live. Where you can look back and see you have failed as much as the priest and Levite or even as the thieves themselves, repent. Then trust in the blood of Christ which cleanses you from all your sin and in trust in the robe of righteousness placed upon you from the one truly righteous Good Samaritan, Christ Jesus your Savior.

Where you can now look out and see the needs of others pray that your Lord will excite you to serve them even to the point of self-sacrifice for His name's sake. In doing so, your neighbors will see Christ's love in action for them and possibly ask about the hope you have within to allow you to give of yourself expecting nothing in return. Truly Christ's love shown to you and expressed now through your loving words and actions toward neighbors, bears witness to His love for them as well. All glory be to our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.