

## BY THIS THEY WILL KNOW

Easter 5 Year C

Acts 11:1-18; Ps. 148; Rev. 21:1-6; Jn. 13:31-35

Gladstone 15/05/2022

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### **My Mean Mother** (Anonymous)

“I had the meanest mother in the world. While other kids had lollies for breakfast, I had to eat cereal, egg and toast. While other kids had cans of drink and lollies for lunch, I had to have a sandwich. As you can guess my dinner was not only different from other kids—I had to eat it at a table and not in front of television. “My mother also insisted on knowing where we were at all times. You’d think we were on a chain gang or something. She had to know who our friends were, where we were going and she even told us what time we had to be home.

“I’m ashamed to admit it but my mother actually had the nerve to break child labour laws. She made us wash dishes, make our beds and even learn to cook. That woman must have stayed awake at nights, just thinking up things for us kids to do. By the time we were teenagers our whole life became even more unbearable. Our old-fashioned mother refused to let us date before we were 15 and then insisted that boys had to come to the door to collect girls from our family, instead of tooting the car horn for them to come running. She really raised a bunch of squares.

None of us kids was ever arrested for shoplifting or busted for dope. “And who do we thank for this? You’re right—‘our mean mother’. “Every day we hear cries from both our people and our politicians about what our country really needs. “What our country really needs—is more mothers like mine!”

Perhaps the world does need more “mean mothers”. The truth is, that this story describes a mother who is anything but mean—a mother who cared enough about her child to provide an environment that would shape his or her future through discipline and the cultivation of good habits.

Our gospel text today could easily be about being a good mother, but actually it is aimed at the whole Christian family. The scene takes place in the Upper Room, immediately after Judas had left to betray Jesus to the religious leaders. Jesus is looking to the cross, where he will glorify God by his perfect obedience to God’s plan. Now, in the shadow of the cross, Jesus is calling his disciples to perfect obedience as well. What is this perfect obedience to which he calls them?

*“A new commandment I give to you,” says Jesus, “that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

The command to love one another, in Judaism, was not unknown. It was very strenuously promoted in the Law. However, in the New Testament, Jesus provides the concept with a new dimension. Love for others must be grounded in his own person—in his own sacrificial love for us. And...for those who follow Christ, it is not an option.

Jesus says, *“A new commandment I give to you...”* Not a suggestion, not a recommendation. A commandment!

Why? Why do we need a commandment to ensure our love for others? It is a commandment because there is a part of every one of us that rebels against the idea of pure, unconditional love. Despite the example that almost everyone of us has received in the form of our Mother’s love for us—there’s a part of us that says such love is out of place in the world in which we live. There is a part of us that says, “Sure, love is great—but only up to a point...”

I had the very illuminating experience once, of interviewing, along with the other elders of a congregation, a member of that congregation who had a number of grievances against a member of the ministry team. This person began by stating that, as a Christian, while she loved this person, she felt it necessary to bring to our attention a number of grievances. Immediately, after making this announcement, however, she opened up a school exercise book in which, page after page, she had listed a huge number of grievances—complete with the date the offence had occurred, the place where the offence had occurred, and the particular nature of offence. Suddenly I realised what was going on. The book showed that this person’s declaration of Christian love was no more than empty words. Love had been declared, but forgiveness was nowhere to be found. True love—Christian love—keeps no records of wrongs.

I tell you this because this person is a perfect example of why Jesus commanded us to love one another—because without the command—and the particular nature of the command—that we love one another just as Jesus has loved us—many of us might end up thinking that it’s good enough to simply make an outward show of your love, while inside you harbour deep resentment and unforgiveness. It is not.

We are called to love others in the way that Christ loves us—as an act, not an emotion. We are called to love our brothers and sisters in the way that mothers love their

children. We are called to love without condition--to care for—and to pray for others—regardless of their attitude towards us—regardless of what they may or may not deserve—regardless of whether or not they are related to us by blood, or by ties of affection or common interest.

We may not always like the other person or the actions of that person, but we are commanded to love that person. The difference is made in your attitude. Attitude is what makes liking a person and loving that person different from one another.

The attitude of obedience, and the attitude of gratitude—obedience to Christ's commandment to love like he loves—to love even the sinners—and gratitude that we have the opportunity to love others in the same way that Christ loves us—that he has given us the opportunity to love others without condition or qualification. Jesus commands us to love one another—just as he loves us.

That may be somewhat of a tough call but our ability to love is derived from our relationship with Jesus Christ. "We love," says the Apostle John, "because he first loved us." We are only able to love because he loves us. Understanding this is critical to our ability to live out the Christian life of love to which Jesus calls us.

Love does not happen in a vacuum. It's something that is passed on from one person to another. This is one reason Christian parents and particularly Christian mothers are so important. Psychologists tell us that a child, who does not receive love, will not be able to give love. There will always be a void there that can never be filled. On the other hand, a child who has received the proper amount of nurturing as an infant and as a toddler will have a sense of security and trust that will last them all their lives.

This is also true with regard to Christ's commandment to love. If you try to keep Christ's commandment without first nurturing your relationship with him, you are doomed to fail. We draw our ability to love others in the way that Christ loves us, from our relationship with God. We get it from the love that Christ is able to pour out upon us when we are in relationship with him. Without that connection—without an understanding and true appreciation of that love—our faith is simply an exercise in noble living. It has no real power to draw us out of ourselves and to centre us in others.

We can only keep the commandment to love one another as Christ loves us, to the extent to which we open ourselves to Christ and allow his love to enter our lives—and to empower our lives. We open our lives to Christ when we pray to him—when we immerse ourselves in his word—and when we gather together with others who

believe—to worship him, to have fellowship with him, and to work together for him in the world.

This then enables us to take Christ's love into the world in which we live, for love is the Christian's primary witness to the world. Our husbands, our wives, our children, and our neighbours will know we are Christ's followers if we have love for them and for everyone we meet.

All of us need to really think about how Christ gave himself for us—how he served us—how he bent down and washed the feet of his disciples—how he gave his time—his energy—his attention—to them—and how for them—and for everyone—he endured without protest—without fighting back—even unto death on the cross.

A survey was once done by a psychology professor. The purpose of the survey was to find out what people think of those who wear glasses. Shoppers in a mall were asked to look at pictures of men and women with and without glasses and rate them according to certain characteristics. The results were quite interesting. Men wearing glasses were considered more intelligent and more trustworthy than those without. In the rating of women for intelligence, however, glasses made no difference. But glasses did add an air of financial success to both sexes. Women with glasses were generally considered more competent than those without glasses. After the survey was completed, the professor actually bought himself a pair of fake glasses to wear at counselling sessions! I suppose he also wanted to create an image of competence.

There are a lot of fakes in this world—but there are some things in life you cannot fake. Love is one of them. It has defining characteristics—the characteristics of Christ—and it produces a fruit that cannot be mistaken—a fruit that keeps on growing and spreading—and changing—changing your family—changing your world—changing your life. It produces love—and joy—and peace—and patience—and faithfulness—and gentleness—and self-control.

Showing love to one-another—real, genuine, Christian love, is not always an easy thing to do. It requires an act of the will, a close relationship with God, and honesty. How will people know that you are disciples of Jesus? *“By this they will know you are my disciples,”* says Jesus, *“if you have love for one another.”*

To Christ our eternal Saviour, be all glory, honour, majesty and power. Amen.