

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples* (John 13). I speak to you in the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. AMEN

You may have heard this story. You may have even lived this story. I imagine it happening at that marvelous intersection near the Episcopal High School, where Braddock Road, King Street, and Quaker Lane converge. In our family we call it malfunction junction. You know that intersection - where the green lights are short, the red lights are long, and the yellow lights are unheeded. My former theology professor, the late Charles Price, used to say that this intersection did wonders for his prayer life; he claimed he could pray the entire Daily Office while waiting for the light to change.

One morning a woman, who was running late for work, pulled up behind another car at the traffic light. The light finally turned green but the man in the car ahead of her did not move. He was clearly in the middle of a text and did not notice that the light had changed. After several friendly toots on the car horn – the car still did not move. What started as a minor irritation quickly simmered into a boiling full-blown case of road rage. Before she realized it, the woman was leaning out of the car window, shouting a litany of obscenities, her left hand making hand motions, her right hand blaring the horn. Finally, finally, the man looks up, just as the light turns yellow, and accelerates through the intersection just as the light turns red leaving the woman behind to sit through yet another cycle of lights. Still fuming at this terrible injustice, the woman hears a tap on her car door. It is an Alexandria police officer who asks for her identification and registration. Too befuddled to ask any questions she immediately complies with the request. After what seems like an eternity, and after abandoning any hope of getting to work on time, the officer returns and tells the woman that she may go on her way.

“I am sorry for the mistake,” he tells her. “It’s just that when I pulled up behind you and heard what you were saying and saw what you were doing, and then when I looked down and noticed your *Episcopal Church Welcomes You* bumper sticker, I was convinced that this car had to be stolen.” *They will know that we are Christians by our love.*

Jesus tells the disciples, *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples.* This new commandment – this 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 15 chapters, 25% of his entire gospel to this one event. It

is obviously a critically important event to him. The placement of this event in his gospel is interesting. It is sandwiched between two critical moments. Just before the passage we have been told that Judas leaves the disciples in order to go and carry out his betrayal of Jesus. Jesus, of course, is aware of his treachery. Just after the passage, Peter proclaims that he would never, ever, under any circumstances, reject Jesus and would be willing to lay down his life for him. It is then that Jesus predicts that Peter will in fact deny him three times before morning, and we know that his prediction becomes a reality. It is here, between betrayal and denial that Jesus chooses to speak about love. Notice that Jesus not only speaks about love, but also sets the standard of love – *Love one another as I have loved you*. We, who live on the other side of the cross, we, who know about Easter, we know that the standard of love is sacrifice. We know that the standard of love is giving oneself away.

I suspect it was easy for Jesus to love the disciples when they were eagerly following him and eager to do his will. I suspect it was hard for Jesus to love the disciples when he knows they would betray him and deny him. Yet Jesus does love them. Jesus gives his life for them, and in doing so, gives his life for us. *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples.*

And here is the crux of the problem, is it not? I cannot speak for you, but I can certainly speak for myself when I say - I do not want to love the knucklehead who is texting while driving. I do not want to love those who stand on the other side of the cultural, religious and political divide from me. When you get right down to it, I do not want to love my neighbor as I love myself. And I certainly do not want to love those who would seek to betray me, deny me, or harm me in any way. But in my heart of hearts, I know that love is the only way. Self-giving, sacrificial, Christ-like love is the only way. To paraphrase Dr. King, darkness cannot cast out darkness, violence cannot cast out violence, hatred cannot cast out hatred, only love can do that – only love.

Jesus stands between betrayal and denial and commands us to love. It is easy rant and rave, honk the horn and shake our fists. It is far more difficult to choose the path of love. It is the only way and our world's only hope.

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