

“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.” John 13:34-35

# How do we love people IN THESE TIMES?

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Just recently, we had the Maundy Thursday Service where we remember how Jesus had given the disciples this new commandment above: that they are to love one another as he has loved them. Why did Jesus tell his disciples this? The disciples were really a motley crew of unlikely team members, with different temperament, occupation and even intellectual ability. Jesus knew that he was the ‘glue’ that held the group together. Therefore, his words “as I have loved you, you also are to love ...” was especially poignant since he knew he was going to leave soon and wanted them to exercise that love for one another. Would there be anyone Jesus would not love? No, even those who betrayed him, he still loved them.

This is the reality – the Christian community is exactly like that, too. It is made up of people from different walks of life, backgrounds, intellectual abilities, temperament and talents. By being able to learn how to love our own

community, then we can effectively love people outside of our community. One of the reasons the Church exists, is to share Christ’s love to those who are outside of the faith community. We have to look beyond ourselves, especially in this time of crisis, even more so, we need to learn to share Christ’s love to others.

This love that Jesus talks about, involves three things:

1. **Sacrifice** – loving others involves sacrificing – taking ourselves out of our comfort zone, conveniences, time and resources.
2. **Beyond empathy** – don’t just feel sorry about something, but do something about it.
3. **Humility** – the act of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet, including those who betrayed and denied him. Sometimes it means we have to “eat humble pie”, accept rejection, disappointments and even abuse. In many cases, it means not taking things personally.

# Beyond empathy

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but do something about it.



In the mid-third century, following war and famine, a similar plague like what we are now experiencing, swept through the Roman Empire, killing an estimated 5,000 people daily at its peak of the pandemic. This was the plague of Cyprian aka the Plague of Carthage. At that time, Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage (modern Tunisia, located in North Africa), gathered all the Christians together to pick up all the dead bodies left lying on the streets and gave them a decent burial.

Bishop Dionysius of Corinth in 260 AD, wrote: "Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves, and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbours and cheerfully accepting their pains."

Eusebius (263 AD-339 AD) was a bishop and a historian of the early church recorded that because of their compassion during the plague, Christians' "deeds were on everyone's lips, and they glorified the God of the Christians. Such actions convinced them that they alone were pious and truly reverent to God."

Such is the history of those who have dedicated their lives to the words of our Saviour,

Jesus Christ, to "love one another as I have loved you" (Jn. 13:34). This simple commandment embodies profound love in action.

This is the challenge for the Church of Jesus Christ today as we face one of the most widespread pandemics in the world. When calamity comes, it is natural for many to ask God why. But God wants to know how we are responding to this calamity instead. It is very heartening to see how Singaporeans are rising up at such a time as this to show care and concern for the community for e.g. an Oxford undergraduate brought together volunteers who are willing to give free tuition to needy students during this Home Based Learning period via a portal; some stall holders giving free food to cab drivers and those in need; churches opened spaces to house the homeless. And the list goes on.

What is our individual response to show Christian love in practical ways? We have to look beyond this Circuit Breaker period. In fact, more will be needed to be done after this.

## ARE WE READY?

### PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us so much that you send your one and only son, Jesus Christ to earth to show us the way. Help us to love one another with the love of God. Keep our minds open to what you are downloading into us. Give us willing hearts and hands to love in practical ways as we are prompted by the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Louis Leong