

Sermon 2007 Easter 5 (Cantate Sunday)
Text: John 13:34-35
Theme: 'What's New?'

The disciples were gathered for the Lord's Supper and Judas had just departed to meet with the ones who would take the Lord away. Jesus told Judas to go do what he had to do and he left.

Then he turned to the remaining eleven and 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."

It was not new that Jesus would say that we should love one another. So why is this a "new" commandment? We have celebrated Quasimodogeniti, Misericordias Domini, Jubilate and today we celebrate Cantate Sunday. Once again, look to the Introit for the theme of this Sunday. "Oh sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things!" Cantate. Sing. A new command and a new song on Cantate Sunday.

It is not new that God is love and it is not new that God expects us to love but what *is new* is the ability to love one another as Christ loves us. When Judas left to do his dirty deed,

he was setting in motion that which would accomplish Christ's goal – although, obviously Judas didn't know that.

God has always wanted us to love one another with the same kind of love that he has for us, but because we were so corrupted by sin, we were unable to do that. No matter how hard we might try, there was just no way that we could push down our selfish human nature enough to truly love another. Our love songs were full of discord and sour notes, but here in the Gospel according to John, Jesus announces a new song.

It is simply a miracle to watch. As our faith in Christ grows, our love for one another grows. I can't really measure it or prove it scientifically, but I know it is true. When faith is weak, it is hard to be selfless and as faith grows, the importance of self decreases. Little kids don't even try to hide it. You know that a three year old really does think that everything revolves around him. Adults get better at being polite about it, but without faith in Christ, we are little more than politically correct three-year-olds.

I am pretty certain that we are all familiar with such a person – a politically correct three-year-old. He is irritating to be sure, but more than that, he is sad. We feel sorry for that person because he is so wrapped up in himself and we know that he is missing out on the joy that is to be had when we let go of ourselves and truly experience Godly love for others.

I know that you have all heard by now of the Ablaze movement within the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. This is a movement that began in St. Louis and is spreading all over the world. The goal is to proclaim the Gospel to 100 million people by the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. Sharing the Gospel is a scary proposition to most people. We don't want to be thought of as Bible beaters, religious fanatics. But sharing the Gospel, according to the Lord, is not full of diagnostic questions and spiritual laws. Listen to what 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."

People will know that we are Jesus' disciples by the love we show to each other. Sharing the Gospel is far broader than some kind of specific verbiage. Sharing the Gospel is the way we live and the way we treat one another.

I have a story to tell about how Jesus has worked in my life to give me faith and grow that faith to the powerful place it is right now. But an unbeliever will never listen to my story until I have earned the right to tell it. And I earn the right to tell my story by listening first to his story. I listen carefully to the song that he is singing, a song that may be full of sorrow and distress, anger and hostility. It may be a song that is sung in a way that makes me uncomfortable using words that make me flinch, but it is his song, not mine. It is all about him, not me.

I went to a play with a Christian group. The play was about a man who was greatly disturbed by many things and he expressed a great deal of hurt and anger in ways that were neither socially polite nor morally right. Many of the Christians with whom I went to the play got up and left in the middle of the performance. I thought to myself,

“If we cannot sit for two hours and listen to the way another human being expresses his pain, how will we ever be able to express God’s love to him?” Being ablaze with Christ’s love starts with a little spark of faith that is created in us by the Holy Spirit when we are baptized or when we first hear the word. Then that flame is fed with the word of God is worship and Bible study and with the Lord’s Body and Blood in the Sacrament. But we were not made to be stoked furnaces for no reason. What does fire do? It spreads. Now we listen and watch carefully for any opportunity to spread the fire of Christ’s love to another.

Today, the ushers have Ablaze cards for you as you leave. The cards ask the question,

“Whom will you share your light with today?” You are a hotly burning furnace of faith and you have much to share. On Cantate Sunday, maybe the better question is,

“With whom will you share your new song today?” The world is full of old songs of anger and distress, despair and sorrow. But you have just what the world needs. Your new song is a love song. Your new song is full of acceptance for every

human being, not necessarily agreeing with the choices he has made but showing him love and respect nonetheless. Your new song is full of forgiveness. Because you have been filled with the fire of Christ's love, you are empowered to forgive all faults. You are able to forgive first yourself and then everyone else. A grudge cannot withstand the force of Christ's fire. Your song is full of joy in knowing that the Lord is already victorious. It is only a matter of time before every tear is wiped away, we are restored to our place in paradise, and the corrupted earth is but a faded memory. AMEN.