

Sermon for the Fifth Sunday of Easter, May 6, 2007 Yr C
Acts 11:1-18: Psalm 148, Revelation 21:1-6, John 13:31-35
The Rev. Dr. Seamus P. Doyle

A new commandment I give you that you have love one for another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

One cannot help but wonder what was going through the mind of Jesus on that night when he decided to give a new commandment. Surely he was well aware that his followers knew the great commandment: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your mind and your neighbor as yourself.* Why, then, did he need to give a new commandment?

If we read all four gospels we get something of an overall picture of the Last Supper. It seems that Jesus washed the feet of all his disciples including Judas; then somewhere along the night an argument or serious discussion broke out among the disciples as to who was going to be the greatest and, at that point, Jesus explained to them they were to be servant leaders. Perhaps this discussion of being the greatest caused him to reflect on an earlier discussion he had with a member of the religious legal profession on what it meant to be a good neighbor. This particular story is related in the Gospel of Luke. *On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" Jesus replied, "How do you read it?" He answered: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, "Love your neighbor as yourself." "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem*

to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Because of his inbred distain for Samaritans, the legal expert could not bring himself to say the word "Samaritan." The parable Jesus told him was designed to drive home the point that to love everyone means being of service even to those with whom we may have cultural or other differences.

A recent TV documentary pointed out that no one bothered to take offense at the rantings of Adolph Hitler; that people became numb to his references to Jewish people as "parasites", etc., and finally became numb to his mode of extermination. We forget that when Hitler wrote his book, Mien Kampf, in the early 1920's he was laying the foundation for his Aryan Nation. He hated the idea that anyone could become a German regardless of ethnic or religious background. In Mien Kampf he wrote:

“In most cases nowadays a person acquires civic rights by being born *within* the frontiers of a State. The race or nationality to which he may belong plays no role whatsoever. The child of a Negro who once lived in one of the German protectorates and now takes up his residence in Germany automatically becomes a 'German Citizen' in the eyes of the world. The whole process of acquiring civic rights is not very different from that of being admitted to membership of an automobile club... What God Himself could not do is achieved by a civil servant through a mere twirl of the hand... and a Mongolian slave is forthwith turned into a real German...” No one really paid attention; no one bothered to challenge him. Ten years later he came to power and we know the rest of the story.

Two thousand years earlier, Jesus' concern was that there were those who wanted to limit who they would love. They wanted to be able to identify “who is my neighbor” so that they could say they were being loving while in fact they were filled with hatred.

Since about the twelfth century, since the time of travel and empire building, many countries have not only conquered others but also destroyed civilizations and all too often with the blessing of the Institutional Church. Missionaries went out to bring the Good News of God in Christ and in the process often imported and imposed their own culture on those whom they referred to as ‘pagans’, ‘infidels’, or ‘primitive people’. We continue this tradition as we label people, ‘Asians’, ‘Foreigners’, ‘Gays’, ‘Lesbians’, ‘Blacks’, ‘Chicanos’, ‘Muslims.’ We do not get to know them as individuals or families. We make judgments about them without verification. We put up

a glass wall and pray they will live in a community other than ours. This is the sad reality of our Christian community in the world today.

Sometime this fall, a documentary movie called BANISHED will be shown on TV. This documentary won first place at the Sun Dance film Festival. It is about three communities in the United States in which African American families were banished and their homes and lands taken from them. It seems that few, if any, including clergy leadership, were disturbed with what was done in these communities. No one, but the African Americans, suffered because of the action of a few and the silence of a majority. Unless this documentary is viewed in the light of Jesus' commandment to love, it will be seen as one more documentary. Unless it is seen in the light of Jesus' commandment and we feel sufficiently moved to say, "this is not going to happen in my community," it will be just another documentary.

From a global perspective it seems that we are all being numbed by what we are being fed on television and newspapers. For example, a few years ago, America debated the meaning of the word 'genocide' in the United Nations while the Hutu tribe committed genocide on the Tutsi tribe in Rwanda. Few people, and fewer clergy, got angry enough to tell our Government to get real and do something. Recently a one liner on the news indicated that the Government in the Sudan is interfering again in Darfur but a five-minute segment was on the antics of a movie star. Thousands of people are existing in tent cities with little to none of the amenities most of us take for granted and too few care enough to tell the Government this is immoral.

Closer to home, Gay persons are being beaten, abused and threatened in our classrooms and in our communities and, for the most part, it is being ignored. Alcohol misuse and abuse is responsible for 250,000 deaths in the United States annually; is responsible for over fifty percent of arrests; is directly or indirectly responsible for one-third of all suicides; is a major factor in the nation's growing child-abuse and sex offenders, and over half the auto deaths on our roads can be credited to alcohol. These are annual statistics but no one becomes angry until it is their own child or family member that becomes the next statistic. And yet, when a mentally ill young man massacres 32 students, a whole state is angry and demanding that everyone should be able to carry a gun.

Jesus lived at a time when there were many atrocities. The world was not as organized as we can be today but Jesus had an answer that he had proved could make a difference; love one another; respect one another; *Choose life and you and your descendents will live.*

The prophet Hosea said, *Do justice and walk humbly with your God.* These words are still as valid today as they were when they were first uttered over two thousand years ago. To *do justice* we have to become consciously aware of the injustice that is perpetrated in our community; the injustices that are being perpetrated in our state, our Nation and in the World. As a Christian community we can change our community, our State and our nation if we take Jesus at his word and live his commandment to its fullest. As a community we can stand up and be counted upon to tell everyone, “ we

love you, regardless of your ethnic or racial background”; “We love you regardless of your gender orientation.” “We love you, and we will take a stand to make sure that ours is a community in which you will feel welcome and you will be made an integral part of it”. As Christians we can turn Jesus’ commandment of love into action by calling our legislators in the State and in the nation, and demand that the laws to be passed support justice for everyone. All this might sound time consuming but really it’s not. As Episcopalians we can become active by clicking onto the Episcopal Network that tracks bills going through the House of Representatives and the Senate. Click whether or not you agree with the issue and add your comments, hit ‘send’ and you’ve done your duty.

In front of “Boys Town” in Omaha, Nebraska is a statue of a young boy carrying another boy. The inscription on the statue reads, “He ain’t heavy, Father, he’s my brother.” This should be our motto with respect to our brothers and sisters in our community, state, nation and the world, regardless of their ethnic, racial background or gender orientation. As a privileged and Christian community, we need to make the commandment to love a living reality by taking a stand for those who feel the weight of injustice because they are different. As a Christian community let us imitate Jesus by word and example and reach out to everyone so that they too can experience what Jesus commanded us to do *love one another as I have loved you*.

If we take Jesus’ commandment seriously and make it a reality then perhaps it will be said of us as was said of the first Christians; *See how they have love, one for another*.

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday of Easter, May 6, 2007 Yr C
Acts 11:1-18: Psalm 148 Revelation 21:1-6, John 13:31-35
The Rev. Dr. Seamus P. Doyle

A new commandment I give you that you have love one for another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

One cannot help but wonder what was going through the mind of Jesus on that night when he decided to give a new commandment. Surely he well aware that he had already answered the question, "Which is the greatest commandment?" by answering "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your mind and your neighbor as yourself." So, why did he need to give a new commandment?

Perhaps he was aware that in reality the old commandment was not working. Remember the story that was told in the Gospel of Luke. "On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" Jesus replied, "How do you read it?" He answered: " Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, `Love your neighbor as yourself." "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he

saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

The legal expert could not bring himself to say the word "Samaritan" because of his inbred dislike for Samaritans. What Jesus put before this expert in the Jewish law was a story to drive home the point that we are to love everyone, including our enemies.

It was pointed out in a recent TV documentary that no one bothered to get angry when Adolf Hitler wrote in chapter one of his book *Mein Kampf*, written in the early 1920's, Adolph Hitler wrote: "The institution that is now erroneously called the State generally classifies people only into two groups: citizens and aliens... In most cases nowadays a person acquires civic rights by being born *within* the frontiers of a State. The race or nationality to which he may belong plays no role whatsoever. The child of a Negro who once lived in one of the German protectorates and now takes up his residence in Germany automatically becomes a 'German Citizen' in the eyes of the world. In the same way the child of any Jew, Pole, African or Asian may automatically become a German Citizen... If the affairs of the candidate are such that it appears likely he will turn out to be a good taxpayer, that is a very important consideration and will help him to obtain civic rights all the more rapidly. The question of race plays no part at all. The whole process of acquiring civic rights is not very different from that of being admitted to

membership of an automobile club, for instance...An applicant who has hitherto been a Zulu or Kaffir is told: "By these presents you are now become a German Citizen." The President of the State can perform this piece of magic. What God Himself could not do is achieved by a civil servant through a mere twirl of the hand. Nothing but a stroke of the pen, and a Mongolian slave is forthwith turned into a real German. I realize fully that nobody likes to hear these things. But it would be difficult to find anything more illogical or more insane than our contemporary laws in regard to State citizenship....The People's State will classify its population in three groups: Citizens, subjects of the State, and aliens. The principle is that birth within the confines of the State gives only the status of a subject. It does not carry with it the right to fill any position under the State or to participate in political life, such as taking an active or passive part in elections. Another principle is that the race and nationality of every subject of the State will have to be proved. A subject is at any time free to cease being a subject and to become a citizen of that country to which he belongs in virtue of his nationality." In the conclusion of the book he goes on to write: "A state which in this age of racial poisoning dedicates itself to the care of its best racial elements must some day become lord of the earth. May the adherents of our movement never forget this if ever the magnitude of the sacrifices should beguile them to an anxious comparison with the possible results." No one got angry. No one bothered to challenge him. Some fifteen years later he came to power and we know the rest of the story.

Jesus' concern was that people wanted to be able to limit who they would love. They wanted to be able to identify "who is my neighbor" so that they could say they were being loving while in fact they were filled with hatred. Life hasn't changed much since then.

If we take a look at so called civilization since about the twelfth century, since the time of travel and empire building, many countries have conquered others, destroyed civilizations and little to nothing was said. Armies were blessed as they went to war with people who had not attacked them. People arrived from alien shores, stole the land from the natives and were blessed for being pioneers.

Missionaries went to countries to bring the Good News of God in Christ as well as to import and impose their own culture on the so called pagans, infidels, primitive people. As long as we can put a label on a community then we can treat them however we want because we do not have to get to know them as people.

Life has not changed much. Sometime in the fall, a documentary movie will be shown on TV about three communities in the United States in which African Americans were banished and their homes and lands taken from them. Few if any became angry with those who created this environment and carried out this hostility. As in Germany, it was best to leave it alone but no one looked into the future to see the consequence of standing on the sidelines.

America debated the meaning of Genocide in the United Nations while the Hutu tribe wiped out most of the Tutsi in Africa. In the Sudan today there are hundreds of thousands of people living in tent cities and we are feeding them while we try to appease the Government which is ignoring us and no one is getting angry. Young gay men are being beaten to death, threatened in the classrooms of our schools and no one is getting angry to do anything about it. Why? Because we are all good Christians. It doesn't happen to my kid so it's none of my business. A mentally ill young man massacres 32 students and a whole state is angry

and demanding that everyone should be able to carry a gun. 70 percent of the adult population, consume in excess of 300 million, gallons of alcohol every year--roughly 3 gallons per drinker. The price we pay is staggering. Alcohol misuse is responsible for 250,000 deaths in the United States annually. Only cancer and heart disease kill more. Half our prison population is incarcerated- because of alcohol-related crimes, and 50 percent, of arrests in America are alcohol-connected. One out of five of those in mental institutions is there because of alcohol misuse. Alcohol is also directly or indirectly responsible for, one-third of all suicides and is a major factor in the nation's growing child-abuse problem. Half the auto deaths on our roads can be credited to alcohol, along with a majority of sex offenses. Alcohol drains the economy of more than \$25 billion each year, including \$1,0 billion in lost work time, \$8 billion for welfare and for- the treatment of alcoholism, \$6 billion for automobile accidents and property damage. And we let this roll off our tongues as facts and we do not get angry about it until it is one of our children who is affected.

The issue before us this morning is love one another as I have loved you. We have to take a look at Jesus in his expression of love, imitate him in our lives and understand that he was angry, he was offended by the level of ignorance, the level of malice that was prevalent in his own time and all he begged of us, commanded us to love one another as he loved us.