

" I Am Commanded "

The Command

French philosopher Renee Des Cartes said: "I think, therefore I am." American Rabbi Abraham Heschel said: "I am *commanded*, therefore I am." Most of us are not used to being commanded and don't like it. Yet reasonable people know that in some situations commands and obedience are necessary; like telling the kids to brush their teeth or get to bed. Anyone who's been in the military knows about command. [Ex: veterans group at funeral in church...]

Jesus commanded. He said, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." This is called the Great Commandment, one-half of what makes a great church. He said this to his disciples; and do you count yourself among that number?

He commanded His disciples to love as he does. Remember, last week I spoke to you about this love. It's a tough kind of love because it's tough to do. It means taking action to love even those we don't think deserve our care. In the Bible it's called **ἀγάπε**. It is one aspect of the fruit of the Spirit which is taught in one of our core classes. It's a type of love that's willing to make a sacrifice for others. The Bible also tells us that when we act this way it allows others to know that we are God's children. Not so that we can show them we are better, but to show them there is a better way.

The Command and Church Membership

We become more like Christ when we obey His commands and thereby become his friends. Do we want to be counted as his friend? He reminded us that we must stay connected to him as a branch is connected to the vine. The branch will take direction from the vine and the branch is necessarily connected (through the vine) to the other branches. You've often heard it said "I can be a good Christian without church." But it's simply not so. You can be good and not be in the church, but that isn't the same as being a Christian. A Christian without a church is a contradiction. Church membership is not about being a good person. It's about commitment: first to Christ, then to other Christians in this fellowship. Commitment is an antidote to our noncommittal society, which is full of "floating Christians." Being a Christian doesn't mean *saying* you believe in a set of universal moral principles. Being a Christian means taking action to live with Christ, as a member of Christ's body, so as to obey his commandments.

Church membership is not a status - something you attain and then put on your resume. It is not something you go through then move on to the next rank. Church membership is commitment to the journey of discipleship in the company of other disciples. Today we are receiving new members at each of our three services. These newest members have been prepared to make a commitment to Jesus Christ to live as one belonging to Him, willing to obey his commands even in choices yet to be made.

These newest members have been taught that all church members are ministers. Not all realize it - some still think of themselves as volunteers who give to Christ's ministry as they please. But to those who have responded to the call of Jesus, confessed him as Lord and Savior, and committed their lives to his service, there comes "a second call." This is the call to fulfill His purposes in your living, as His agent in this world. A sense of unity and true belonging in church can only come from a common mission in Christ, a sense of being called, that

fosters a vivid knowing that we are His people. Joining the church means you join the company of sinners who want to come closer to Christ, be shaped by Him, and to be used in His service. If this is not your reason for being in church, then maybe you better reexamine why you come to here. As Scripture makes clear Christ is the true vine and that's where we better hang on.

The Meaning of His Command

When Jesus gave his commands he was sharing his core values for the church and expected his followers to obey. On that last night, when they shared the Passover meal, their last meal together before he was crucified, they rented a room. It was customary for a servant to welcome the guests and wash peoples' feet. But there was no servant there to meet them. Still, dusty feet had to be washed before the meal. So the disciples looked at one another and wondered who was going to do it. They played the pecking order game; who's the least among us and therefore the one who should wash others feet. Peter, James and John probably thought "We're part of the inner circle so it won't be one of us."

But while they're all looking around, Jesus *did* something. He picked up the towel and basin of water and began the servant's job. This bugged Peter. He said, "Lord you can't wash my feet." What he was really saying was, "Lord, if I was the leader of this group I sure wouldn't be washing feet."

Jesus responded to Peter by telling him "if you won't let your feet be washed you won't have any part of me." Peter says "Well then, wash my feet, wash my hands, give me a bath!" Just like Pete, if he can't have one extreme he'll have the other. That evening Jesus showed his disciples what he meant by loving one another.

How could He do this? He could do this because he had nothing to prove, he had nothing to lose, he had nothing to hide, knew what his mission was, and he knew where he was going. Because of his great security he was able to love others with that tough love he embodied. It is the same security we can have when living with him.

That is quite a contrast from how leadership and power is so often expressed in this world. Jesus took a basin of water to wash his disciples' feet. A basin of water appears again within 24 hours of this incident: Roman governor Pontius Pilate stands before a crowd that is calling for Jesus' death. Pilate knows what is the right thing to do, but instead puts water in a basin and washes his hands of the whole thing. Jesus took a basin of water and went beyond the call of duty, below his rank, and through his love. Pilate took a basin of water to avoid the call of duty and pull rank through his fear.

Jesus gave up his rights and took on responsibility, and that's the way for us. I think this may be counter-cultural these days: that is, take on responsibility. Loving one another never happens until we do that. [See also John 10:17-18 - Jesus lays down his life of his own accord. Christians still have rights. To surrender our rights, though, is vastly different than having them taken away.] This is the Great Commandment, one-half of what makes for a great church. Jesus also commanded, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." That's the Great Commission. Coupled with the Great Commandment it makes for a great church. Love one another and go to make disciples of all nations; two actions, one great mission. We are commanded.

Obeying the Command

The acid test of obeying our Lord is this: are we willing to adjust ourselves in order to obey His commands? Here at FUMC we're being

stretched in God's ministry: we're stretched financially, we're stretched for time, we're stretched for leadership and personnel to carry out all the ministry and mission God lays before us. I don't think I'm alone in being at the edge of my comfort zone - maybe even the fringe of fear? But that's usually where God can do the most with us: at the edge of our comfort zones. Look at us, crazy Christians embarking on a major new building program just as the economy turned south! When the economy changes some companies hunker down into survival mode, some go out of business. But the great ones look for opportunity, then retool and keep on going. That's what we need to do, retool so we can keep on spreading the transforming power of Jesus Christ. That's our business.

Our days are full of little things, meetings, decisions, phone calls, emails, skirmishes, meals, chores. It can seem to add up to very little; but that's just where God speaks to us. And the words God speaks to each of us are "be brave... be compassionate... feed my lambs... don't give up... love one another... seek out the lost... go and make disciples... press on toward the goal." You and I have an important mission to fulfill at this church. I am commanded, therefore I am. He has commanded us.