

Our scripture today talks about Christ's sacrificial love, in which he gives his disciples a new commandment to love like he has loved. We'll begin this morning with a video clip from the movie *Frozen*. Sisters, Elsa and Anna, will show us what sacrificial love looks like. [Show Clip].

"An act of true Love will thaw a frozen heart."<sup>1</sup> True love is a love that is willing to sacrifice for another. It goes beyond warm feelings. It's an action that gives up something for someone else. Anna was willing to give up her life for her sister, yet Elsa's love thaws her frozen heart. Christ knows that only sacrificial love will thaw a frozen or wounded heart.

The context of this passage tells us the type of love Christ is talking about. The very first phrase sheds some light: "As soon as Judas left the room" (v.31). Jesus and his disciples are in the Upper Room at the Last Supper. Jesus just washed their feet, and they shared the bread and the cup. Then, Jesus tells them that his time has come. For it to come to pass, he knows that it begins with Judas' betrayal. He knows what he is about to endure. He knows what's coming, and so he puts it into motion by telling them that one of them would betray him.

And, after this passage, Jesus predicts Peter's denial. The disciple who is known for his faith, the one who is considered the leader of the disciples, the one who later becomes the first Pope in the early church, says, "I will lay down my life for you," (v.37) Jesus. But Jesus tells him, "No, you will deny me three times by morning" (v. 38).

Yet, even on the cusp of the betrayal, the denial, the arrest, the suffering, Jesus

still tells them to love. He forgave his oppressors, he forgave the betrayal, he forgave the denial. And, he still loved sacrificially by laying down his life. When Jesus tells his disciples to love others just as he has loved them in verse 34, he is referring to the sacrifice he is about to make on the cross.

Jesus knows this will be a trying time for the disciples, so he wants them to pull together through this, not break apart. He doesn't want them to blame each other or the religious leaders. He doesn't want them to hold so much hate and anger in their hearts that it consumes them. He wants them to be different, to be set apart. He wants them to love like he loves because it is this kind of love that heals angry and wounded hearts.

Jesus gives them a new way of living. Despite other people's actions of betrayal and denial, Jesus says to love like he loved, and he makes it a new commandment. The Torah, the old commandments, tell them to love, but the word "new" shows us that there will be a change, from the old to the new. Christ's sacrificial love will bring a newness to their faith. Christ's death and resurrection will cause a shift. Easter will change everything, and there will be a new way to love.

Before, if someone was seeking to follow God completely, they had to go through a long process of conversion that involved: "being circumcised, living by a dietary code, and strictly observing Sabbath."<sup>2</sup> Now, Jesus said just "Love each other" (v.34)... "Love each other as I have loved you" (v.35), sacrificially. Because

---

<sup>1</sup> *Frozen* movie clip

<sup>2</sup> R. Michael Sanders, *Disciplines*, 164.

this kind of love will transform more people than following any strict religious rules.

Jesus even said, “This is how everyone will recognize you as my disciples. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples” (v.35) that you are Easter People. This kind of love is a mark of distinction. We’ve all seen it. You know when people are committed followers of Christ by the way they treat people, by the way they love people. There’s just something different about them. We see God in them, that’s the difference. Christ’s love just comes through them. Christ knew that this was more important than following strict dietary codes or rituals. Love like this is what changes lives.

When did someone love you like this? Take a moment and think about a time when someone loved you sacrificially. Write down a name or a time when someone showed a love like this to you. When you knew they were giving up something for you. When they forgave you or gave generously without wanting something in return. By a show of hands, how many people wrote down a name or time when someone loved you like this. So, it’s possible. This kind of love seems impossible, but you just proved that it is possible.

As Easter People, we are called to love sacrificially as Jesus loved, even if it seems impossible. Easter People are to be known for their love. This kind of love is rare and hard to do. That is why people notice when we love like this. They know that this love comes from a higher source; it comes from God. When we love sacrificially, hearts are thawed, healed, and changed.

I will close by reading a poem titled, *The Path of Faith* by Steve Garnaas-Holmes. This is his response to this passage about sacrificial love. As Easter People, we are called to this path of faith.

The path of faith  
is not just to believe in God  
but to live as if you do:  
to love the loveless;  
to pour yourself out as light;  
to forgive fearlessly; to listen deeply;  
to be humble, knowing you are held  
in the highest regard in the halls of heaven,  
to give exceedingly, knowing you receive  
more;  
to feed the hungry, remembering your  
hunger;  
to act for justice boldly, having been set  
free.  
It is to trust God in the awfulest times,  
and to see God even in the worst of yourself.  
It is to see God and to seek God in the  
plainest things,  
the beautiful and the hard, the welcome and  
the strange.  
It is to move out of your little circle of light  
knowing when you step into the darkness  
the light will come with you.  
It is to love without judgment or exception,  
knowing that is how you are loved.  
The path of faith is not just to believe in God  
but to reach out to what you believe to be  
God.  
It is to entrust yourself to the One who  
believes in you,  
and who loves the whole world,  
and to become that One, who is already one  
with you.  
The path of faith is to become the love God  
has for you  
which is for all the world.  
May it be so.