

John 13:31-35 Easter
May 19, 2019

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Ok – Who here knows the 10 Commandments? There are 10 of them. Can you name them?

#1 is – You shall have no other gods

#2 is – You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

#3 is – Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy

#4 is – Honor your father and your mother

#5 is – You shall not kill

#6 is – You shall not commit adultery

#7 is – You shall not steal

#8 is – You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor

#9 is – You shall not covet your neighbor's house

#10 is – You shall not covet your neighbor's spouse, servants, cattle, or anything that belongs to your neighbor

The big 10. Pretty basic, right? Everyone is familiar with them?

So, let me ask you this - where is the love in the big 10?

Is there love in the big 10?

I would argue that in and of themselves they have very little to do with love. They are basically - don't fight with one another and don't harm one another, but as far as love is concerned, there isn't much there.

I mean, I don't have to love you to not kill you. I don't have to love you to not steal your stuff. When it comes to love, the 10 Commandments set a very low bar, wouldn't you agree?

Perhaps they are a good way to love God. Maybe? Maybe not?

Through our love for God, perhaps we don't harm one another. Two through 10, after all, all fall off of number one – God is God. But, maybe that's not love. Maybe that's just fear.

I mean, based on the law itself, do we follow it out of love for each other or purely out of fear of God?

I'm thinking it's out of fear. God is God and we do not want to tick God off, right? That brings about wrath and all sorts of un-pleasantries.

So, if we follow the 10 Commandments purely out of fear, guess what - there is no love. There is no love, because perfect love casts out all fear. Let me say that again - perfect love casts out all fear.

With love, there is no fear.

Jesus came to chase all fear away so that we can live for God instead of for our own self-preservation. In love, we are set free from fear to look out for one another.

So, Jesus comes in love and gives us a new commandment – that we love one another. Love one another. Love as you have been loved. Forget about being fearful of God.

Just love one another. Seek out the best for one another. Care for one another. Focus on the love. And, when we do that and we fulfill Jesus' commandment, which is what it's really all about. Loving one another.

Perfect love, God's love, casts out all fear.

The big 10 were given to enable a rag tag group of people who were just set free from slavery to live with one another in peace. They no longer had the Egyptians to tell them what to do. So, Moses tells the Israelites – Listen up - this is our covenant with God – we promise we're not going to kill, steal, or lie about one another.

And then, 3000+ years later, Jesus comes to set us free from the one thing that still holds all of us captive – fear. Fear of punishment and fear of death.

Jesus comes to set us free from that fear and then gives one new commandment – that we love one another, because love casts out all fear. And with that commandment, we go beyond just living together to living for one another.

It's not just about living together. It's about living for one another. That's the kingdom of God. That's love. That's the absence of fear.

So, just as Jesus lives for us, he sends us to live for one another.

Life and love – they go hand in hand. And, it's only set free from fear that we can truly live and thereby love.

In the cross and resurrection, Jesus is setting the example of perfect love for us. Jesus is setting God's example of love for us and casting out our fear. With Christ, we have nothing to fear. Love casts out all fear.

Disciples follow where their rabbi goes, and Jesus is inviting us to follow in his footsteps of love – to love others so much that we give of ourselves for their wellbeing.

On the night before his death, Jesus loves his disciples by washing their feet. In an act of service, Jesus proclaims to his disciples that he loves them, and through the cross and resurrection he proclaims to us that nothing can destroy that love.

Nothing can destroy God's love for us.

Before Jesus was crucified, most of the disciples deserted him and Peter denied knowing him three times.

After the crucifixion, the disciples locked themselves up out of fear. They were afraid that they, as Jesus followers, would be the next to be killed.

And then when Jesus appears to them after the resurrection, they are initially afraid that Jesus is angry with them. They all had basically broken number 8. By not defending him, they had born false witness against him.

But Jesus shows up after the resurrection and says – Peace be with you. Peace be with you. I still love you. Nothing has changed my love for you. Love cannot be destroyed. Do not be afraid. Peace be with you.

God is not an angry god trying to whip us all into shape. On the contrary, God is loving and forgiving, constantly working to restore our relationship with God so that we can restore our relationships with others.

Perfect love casts out all fear.

Love is relational. Love is forgiveness.

Love is looking at one another and knowing that we are not perfect, but we are lovable.

My cat is constantly puking on my carpet, which I have to constantly clean up, but that doesn't change my love for my cat. Sure, I might grumble, but I still love my little fuzzy faced companion. I'm not going to punish him, on the contrary, I'm constantly looking for ways to make him feel better. That's what love does.

I'm sure all of you parents know what love is, especially when you looked upon your newborn child and knew that they were totally dependent on you, and you knew you would do anything to keep them safe. That's God's love for us.

In the resurrection, Christ is proclaiming that God has done everything to keep us safe. God is not seeking to harm us. God is only seeking for us to know the good news of God's unconditional love for us – a love that cannot be destroyed – no matter what we do – like Judas – or what we do not do – like Peter and the rest.

Perfect love casts out all fear.

And the good news later comes to Peter that love carries through all time and place to include all those who were once thought to be beyond God's good news. When God says all are beloved – God means all. There are no cursed people. Only fully beloved people. That's it.

God's love is eternal! It is the alpha and the omega, it is the beginning and the end, and everything in between. And when we share that love, God is among mortals, because God's peace is among us.

We are Jesus' disciples and we have our commandment – that we love as God has loved us, and that means that we keep loving even beyond death.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Thanks be to God. Amen.