

- Rev. Grant Mangold, www.RiversideChurchIowa.com

IMPOSSIBLE LOVE ?

Jesus says the most impossible things, in John 15. Is He serious? For example, verse 12 "***This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.***" Right before and after (verses 7 and 16), He connects this command with prayer, "***ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.***"

Rriiighhht. How's that working for YOU? Even on Valentine's Day, we struggle with just how to show true "love" to someone that we do "love" or at least try to, or think we try to, or hope we try to. You might even pray about how to show true love to that special someone. We get kinda tongue-tied about it.

Jesus spoke these words privately, to His disciples. A dozen typical guys, and a few gals. Fishermen, mostly. Just ordinary men, handpicked by Jesus. But not particularly talented. Their formal religious education had already been cut short from continuing on to aspire to becoming a priest or scribe.

The other Gospel writers reveal how His disciples were arguing about who among them would be the greatest in His kingdom. The people had tried to make Jesus "King" and rejoiced in His Triumphant Entry. But Jesus kept talking about "going away" and being "lifted up." They knew that meant crucifixion.

In the midst of allaying their fears about this, Jesus spells out His "new commandment." He brings it up often in John 13,14,15. He says "***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.***" Jesus had already affirmed Old Testament teachings to "love God with all your heart and mind and will" and "love your neighbor as yourself" and said these were the "greatest" commandments. So what's "new" about this command to love?

In John 13, Jesus changes "neighbor" to "one another" and He changes "as yourself" to "as I have loved you." This is significant. The "love" that Jesus talks about it is not emotional, sentimental, or romantic. It's not feelings, it's action. It's obeying His COMMAND. He gave them the object lesson of washing their feet, and told them to do likewise. He said "***Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.***" We think of this on national holidays as the supreme sacrifice of the armed forces or first responders. But Jesus means everyday life and everyday people. You and me. Today.

First, it means the special way that Christians are to love other Christians. The Bible explains that all who believe in Christ as Lord and Savior are in spiritual "union" with Him and therefore in spiritual union with all others in every place and time who are also in union with Him. That's the "body of Christ." In John 15 it's pictured as being branches of the vine of Christ. The community of believers. Loving other believers as yourself and like Jesus loved them WILL bear witness that you do belong to Christ. He says, "***By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.***"

Next, it means the self-sacrificing way that Christians are to love others, believer and non-believer alike. "Love" means putting the best interest of the other ahead of your own. Giving them the benefit of the doubt. Letting their rights trump yours. But not being a squishy doormat, because "tough love" can be necessary so that you do not simply enable the aberrant behavior of others. It means you "show and tell" the good news about Jesus - how He transforms ordinary people to become more like Him.

And when you bear His fruit by "remaining in His love," you not only love others like He does, but you can also pray effectively. Maybe not exactly what you ask, but what God wills. Because in Christ, your prayers will be in God's will, just as your life is no longer in your flesh but in Him - by the power of His Holy Spirit.

Two big IMPOSSIBLE things. Love. Pray. Like Jesus. How can YOU do them? First, be united to Jesus by trusting Him as Lord and Savior. Receive His spiritual life by putting all your trust in Him. Believe in Him with all your heart and mind and will, all that you are believing in all that He is. Then, live it out. Trust & obey. Live in union with Christ, by the power of His Holy Spirit by which you receive His spiritual life, and then you WILL bear the fruit of His life, and you will bear witness to Him. In love, in prayer, in life.

Impossible - yes, in your own strength and in your own flesh. But not only POSSIBLE but a PROMISE - in the power of the Holy Spirit. Supernatural power to love and to pray. ***So that***, Jesus says, "***My joy may be in you and that your joy may be full.***" Rejoice in His promises - and His power - today!