

Title: Celebration of Love
Scripture Reference: John 15:12-17

¹²My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ¹⁷This is my command: Love each other.

I Corinthians 13.13

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Committed to LOVE - Obedience

During my holidays, I was reminded of the news of the oil leakage on TV almost every day. The oil well leakage in the Gulf of Mexico is of a great and grave concern for the people in America. Every attempt is made to plug the leakage. BP took up full page advertisements to assure the public that they are taking full responsibility in commitment to deal with the oil spill situation. Their commitment comes with a very heavy price. They are committed to place everything and anything to stop the leakage. They have made every available resource to meet that commitment - taking very high risk, making unconventional and unproven approach, even to the point of breaking their own safety rules trying to bring about a closure to the leakage.

Their commitment is admirable. There is no turning back. They cannot just abandon the disaster leakage and call it quits. There is no option for them - for they are the best people on the job who have the best knowledge and technology. They are needed most in the crucial hour of the disaster. The end will come only when the leakage is stopped and when all the discharge of the millions and millions litres of oil is cleaned up; bringing back sea life to the days before the disaster struck. Giving back the fishing communities their livelihood as they are dependent on the ocean. How long would this take? No one is certain. Is there a solution? They have tried and are still trying and have not given up yet.

No Turning Back until the Leakage is Plugged. Day and Night, more than 20,000 people both on land and at sea are working tirelessly to commit themselves to bring that enormous task of the leakage to a complete stop. There is certainly a sense of urgency.

40 Days of LOVE Campaign to plug the leakage of disobedience

As we bring the 40 Days of Love campaign to a climax this morning – Is there a sense of urgency for us to do something? What is that one thing that we learn that will motivate us to love one another coming out from our hearts? For one, we ought to recognise there is another huge leakage that pollutes the order of this world from the days at the Garden of Eden. Please bear with me as I do need your help with some imagination here.

What is leaking? The leakage of disobedience to God's word and command. The leakage of lies and division that threatens to bring disharmony and distrust in all relationships between God and man,

among friends, business partners, family members, relatives, even between husband and wife; pushing divorce cases up. Christians are not even spared. The leakage that causes family breakdown and social chaos in society.

God needs you and me in this crucial moment as His chosen people to plug this leakage that causes lies and division in our society that draws people away from God. The solution is simple – to trust God and to obey what God says – that what He says, will happen and it is good for our souls.

It will take our entire life time to be committed to the task that God has given us to plug the leakage. On only one supreme command to all believers from our Master in John 15: “This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.”

We have come to this crucial moment this morning to state our stand; to be committed to what God has command – that is, to love one another. Never let go or quit when the world needs us now to plug this leakage of disobedience.

Today, we celebrate the end of a LOVE campaign. What are we celebrating? That there is hope to secure a victory of joy in our lives when we choose to obey God; to be committed to love one another and no turning back. The end result - Jesus says in v11, “I have told you this, so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!” (NLT)

DISOBEDIENCE leads to DIVISION

In his farewell prayer for his disciples, Jesus prays for unity in the church (17.11), “Holy Father, keep them and care for them – all those you have given me – so that they will be united just like we are.” V22. “I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are – 23. I in them and you in me, all being perfected into one. Then the world will know that you sent me and will understand that you love them as much as you love me.”

The quickest way to destroy the church is division. Disobedience leads to division. Disobedience to what God calls us to do. God cannot empower us to love if we so choose to disobey. Division destroys a body of people quicker than any other single war strategy. The devil knows its effectiveness when he tempted Eve. The devil will tempt us, but we decide. So, don't give the devil any credit. Blame it on our choice to disobey. Seek forgiveness quickly if we have made the ungodly choice to turn against what God has told us to do.

Division can destroy the body of Christ. Division can destroy a fellowship of believers. It destroys the effectiveness of us being a witness of God's love; and worst of all, causing others, the pre-believers, to stumble from seeking the true and living God in the Christian faith. In fact, when we disobey God's commandment to love one another, we drive others away from coming close to Him and to the church fellowship. We cause ourselves to become the enemies of God.

O Lord, please forgive us. We do not want to be Your enemies. Is there someone, or the pastors or the church leaders who may have said some words or comments that hurt you? In Jesus' name, can you forgive that person and make peace with him or her for your own sake? Do not go against God.

How to prevent Disobedience and Division?

Jesus gives us a simple solution in today's text - to love one another. How?

Firstly, Learn to love a friend like Jesus (Friendship) v13

Secondly, learn to love by exercising the fruit of the Spirit (Fruitfulness) v16

Be A Friend

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.”
Jesus says, “You are my friends.” (v13)

Jesus has set a **supreme standard** to lay down his life for us, as he considers us to be his friends. What does it mean to be a friend? When we are willing to die for one another and to stick to each other in times of joy and sadness. What Jesus had done on the cross for us is the greatest example of human self-sacrifice. The disciples of Jesus Christ were called to this kind of devotion to one another.

To lay down his life for us, Jesus the Son of God gave up his rights to his heavenly throne. He gave up receiving all glory and worship from the heavenly host. He did it to become like us in order to save us from eternal death.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, in a similar manner, we are to follow the example of Jesus to give up our rights for the sake of others, in order to save them from eternal death. We have our rights to many things in life. To Property when our parents die, seeking justice for being hurt, right to a good home, to a deserving promotion ...

Giving up our rights to ourselves means to accept the lordship of Jesus Christ in our lives. This is the devotion expected of every believer. Jesus Christ gave up his right to the heavenly throne in obedience to God the Father; to fulfil His will that **all may be saved**. We may win our rights, but often than not, because of bitter dispute to win that right, we prevent our friends, relatives, spouses from coming close to Christ.

What good is it that we win our rights in a heated contest and lost the opportunity of saving the souls of our brothers and sisters?

Jesus loves his enemies as well; He has laid down his life for them, too. For when they are saved, these one-time enemies of Jesus would become his friends eventually. So it is well to say that Jesus died for his friends and for his enemies, too. The Apostle Paul was an excellent example. A one-time persecutor of Christ, he became a great apostle for Christ - even unto his death, he would preach Christ. Now, I understand better why Jesus taught us to love our enemies and to bless them. Can we see through the compassionate eyes of Jesus that everyone including our enemies, can one day be a Christian like us, too?

There is another condition to be Jesus' friends found in v14. “You are my friends, **if** you do what I command you.”

The one condition is to Trust and Obey Christ. For that is the only way. We show to the world that we are friends of Jesus by our obedience to His word and command. **The bond of friendship** in Christ is built on the Word of God; and the obedience to put it into practice in our lives. “By this shall the world know that you are my disciples.” Do not hesitate to join the discipleship classes.

As we are on the topic of friends, let's turn to the OT to examine who were those considered to be friends by God. It will help us to appreciate why Jesus calls us his friends.

Who were those that God called them as FRIENDS in the OT?

God addressed Abraham as, “My Friend”. (2 Chronicles 20.7; Isaiah 41.8). Moses was considered a friend when God had a face to face talk with him. (Exodus 33.11) These prophets were chosen by

God and God called them, "My friend". When Jesus says that I have chosen you and call you friends, it is an awesome privilege that we stand abreast with these ancient prophets in the eyes of God.

It is awesome. This privilege carries with it a solemn responsibility, too – that is, to remain steadfast in the faith of Abraham, of a promised nation; and in Moses, that hope of securing a place in the promised land - kingdom of God. Keep in mind these 2 words, faith and hope. Both Abraham and Moses did not see the promised nation or the promised land in their life time. Yet, they believe what God says will come true. Abraham had the faith and Moses had the hope. In the intimacy of friendship, God revealed to his friends, many revelations of himself and his salvation plan to save mankind and to bless them with joy and peace. God wants his friends to take a part of his divine plan to save mankind.

Intimacy of Friendship

In verse 15, servants just carry out orders but with friends, we confide our deepest thoughts with one another. There are little secrets that only friends could understand. Confidential information is passed from one friend to another. When Jesus calls us his friends, He reveals the secrets in the heart of Father God - His desire that all be saved from eternal death.

Jesus told his disciples of his own departure from earth, the coming of the Holy Spirit, his coming again to receive us. While waiting, Jesus gives his disciples this responsibility to stay united as one; that is to love one another.

Secondly, learn to love by exercising the fruit of the Spirit, learn to abide in the Living Vine and be fruitful.

WE are chosen and appointed to bear fruit. Fruit that lasts. Fruit of the Holy Spirit bearing God's character. Fruit of discipleship going beyond just mere profession of faith in saying the sinner's prayer. Jesus sent forth his disciples with his assurance that the Father in heaven would grant them whatever they asked for in Christ's name. Objective - to fulfil our purpose in bearing the fruit of the Spirit. With the fruit of the Spirit, the ultimate desire of Christ is the fullness of JOY bestowed upon us as his disciples and we in unity. v11.

The new community of Jesus is asked to live a life of obedience. Jesus promises a life of fruitfulness. The fruit that characterises the image of God, including love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5.22,23)

Where can the fruit be grown? On the living vine, of course. We as branches, as Jesus illustrates earlier in chapter 15. We must be connected to the vine in order to bear fruit. To remain in the vine we have the potential to be fruitful. Because we are branches, we can draw life from Jesus, the living vine. What we cannot do by ourselves, Jesus can accomplish in us!

Key to life in the Christian community is LOVE.

The last wish of our Lord Jesus' prayer for his disciples is to see unity. The unity of his disciples with the Father, as the Father and Jesus are one. God created us to be in His image to be one. The leakage of disobedience and division has caused much damage to what God has beautifully created. It pollutes everything that God has planned for us to enjoy all relationships. His command to stop this leakage is simply: To love one another.

Be committed to LOVE on two conditions we learn today.

Firstly, Learn to love a Friend by our obedience to the Word of God. Study the Bible carefully and let the bond of friendship be based on the Word of God. "You are my friends if you do what I command." Give up your rights for the sake of your friends that they may be saved from eternal death.

Secondly, Learn to bear fruit and exercise the fruit of the Spirit. Be Fruitful and Multiply. When we are busy seeking the fruit of the Spirit, we have no time to pick up a quarrel to fight with one another. We will also be so busy working with Jesus Christ to produce more fruit in disciple-making. Fruit that last - meaning that the people we disciple and mentor will in turn produce more disciples. And the multiplication process will go on and on. That is the hope for the church to survive. Jesus did not call us to build huge business empires to finance his work on earth. Just be fruitful.

Jesus warns us in John 15.6, those branches that do not bear fruit, they will be gathered (cut) and be thrown into the fire to be burned.

It is LOVE that will motivate us to be fruitful, drawing people to Christ. Love will last forever. Faith and Hope will come to an eventual end when God's promise is fulfilled; but Love among the people of God will last forever. Love is eternal as God being the Eternal One has no beginning and no end. (Romans 16.26)

Now, I understand why the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13.13, "And Now the three remain: Faith, Hope and Love, the greatest is Love."

"Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His faithful love endures forever." Psalm 107.1

Let's prepare our hearts to meet Jesus at the Lord's Table as His friends. Being His friends, we are to commit to love, to obey Him and to fulfil His desire to see unity in His church, starting from here at BMC and from us as His friends to love one another. Amen

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