

THE FIRST 15

Thursday, January 2, 2025

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Today is Tuesday, January 2. As a new year begins we explore what the Bible says about new beginnings.

OPENING PRAYER

As I enter a time of prayer, I pause and become still. I calm my thoughts and silence my mind. I breathe deeply and slowly, and center myself upon the presence of God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Holy Lord, in the peace of these morning moments, I long to experience Your presence. Come Holy Spirit, reveal the new things you want for me in this new year. Enable me to hear the message You have for me in the name of Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

When he (Judas Iscariot) was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:31-35

REFLECTION

Jesus gathered those who were closest to Him in the Upper Room the night before His suffering and death. Jesus performed two dynamically simple yet profoundly deep gestures. These were loving actions that would be told and retold to generations of Christ followers. He washed His friends' feet and He shared a meal with them. He cleansed them and fed them. He loved them and gave them a new commandment. A mandate to love one another. On the basis of the love of God and Jesus Christ for me, I am to love. Love is the new commandment that Christ gave, the summary of all the commandments. God wants me to extend this love to Him, to my neighbors and even to my enemies. Love is the first and highest of all Christian virtues, even greater than faith and hope (1 Corinthians 13:13) and the key indicator of the Christian disciple. I am to live a new life - loving God and loving others.

Judas Iscariot left the table and went out into the night to betray Jesus. The actions of one of His closest friends, whose feet He had just washed, will condemn Him to death by crucifixion. With His next breath Jesus told His followers to love one another. Jesus responded to betrayal, rejection, and condemnation with love. He commands me to love. I am to love others at all times and in all circumstances. Jesus provides the example of perfect love and says to me, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." I consider the enormous amount of love and forgiveness Christ has bestowed on me, even though I have been undeserving of His mercy, continually rebellious, negative and sinful. Jesus loved me and died for me. I think about those people who have hurt me, disappointed me, betrayed me, and let me down. What has been my response?

I ask myself where I am in today's text. Perhaps I have left the room with Judas, already moving on to my own ambitions and priorities. Maybe I linger at the table with Jesus, with clean feet and a content appetite, lovingly washed and fed by my Lord. I hear Jesus speaking directly to me, giving me a new command to take into a new year. "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." When I get up from the table, cleansed and fed, how will I demonstrate my love to others? To whom do I most need to extend love in this new year?

Ask: In this new year, will people see my love and know I am a disciple of Jesus Christ? How can I increase in love for God and others in 2025?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Most gracious God, You are holy, loving and full of mercy. Thank You for loving me despite my transgressions and failures. Forgive me for the times I have denied or betrayed You. Forgive me for my lack of love for friends and neighbors. Help me to grow in love for others, even my enemies. In this new year, I embrace this commandment of Jesus - to live a life of love. Holy Lord Jesus, teach me to love. I invite You into my heart and ask You to remove places of hurt, anger, and unforgiveness. Cleanse my spirit of unkindness and fill me with compassion and mercy. Reveal those whom I need to forgive and grant me grace to forgive them unconditionally, even when it may go unnoticed or unappreciated. Bring to mind acts of kindness I can extend to others to demonstrate Your love. Amen.