A New Command

John 13:18-38

Key Verse:13:34 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

People say that human beings are the crown of God’s creation. We believe that human beings are created by God as the most intelligent and powerful creatures among all. Indeed as high tech proves the tower of human intelligence and power has reached to the level higher and deeper beyond our imagination. However, these intelligent and powerful human beings are also weak, limited, vulnerable, and fragile compared to other creatures, even to low level animals. Not only physically but also mentally and psychotically we human beings show our weakness and fragility before the Creator our God.

In today’s passage Jesus predicts Judas’ betrayal and Peter’s denial. Just before he was arrested, Jesus had to confront painful challenges through his two top disciples. How did Jesus go through this hardship? Today’s passage teaches us how Jesus overcame this critical moment and how he helped his troubled disciples. While studying this passage, I pray that God may give us courage and wisdom to overcome our weaknesses and experience the power of Jesus’ love and faith. Amen.

First, Judas’ betrayal (18-30) Previously Jesus washed his disciples’ feet like a loving mother who washed her children’s dirty feet. After washing their feet, Jesus said, “As I have washed you, you also must wash one another’s feet”. Washing other’s feet is forgiving other’s sin, forbearing their weaknesses, and forfeiting the record of their wrongdoings. Today Jesus washes the dirtiness of our feet for anyone who brings his or her dirty feet to him, not by water and but by his own blood. The Bible says that the blood of Jesus has power to wash away all our sins. He is ready and willing to accept us as we are and to wash us from all unrighteousness and sin. This is why Jesus came to this world.

Look at verse 18. “***I am not referring to all of you. I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the passage of the Scripture. ‘He who shared my bread has turned against me.***” In this verse Jesus predicted Judas’ betrayal. Jesus chose the Twelve among the crowd. Judas was chosen to become Jesus’ disciples. Being chosen by Jesus was a great blessing and privilege for all of us. Judas did not choose Jesus, but Jesus chose him and appointed him to bear good fruits (Jn 15:16) But Judas bore bad fruits, the fruit of betrayal. He did not keep the blessing and privilege of being chosen. Through Judas’ case we learn that all those who are chosen are not always saved. When we cannot appreciate God’s calling and maintain it, we may lose God’s blessing. Jesus said in Matthew 22:14, “*For many are invited, but few are chosen.*” Many are chosen, but few are saved. God gave us freewill of making a choice and we are responsible for our choice.

Betrayal is one of the most intolerable suffering and pain. It is like being stabbed on back by close and reliable person. Jesus chose Judas among many and loved him as his own. They lived together for three years like one family. Judas enjoyed all spiritual blessings with other disciples like a brother. Jesus loved Judas to the end by washing his dirty feet. Jesus often predicted his betrayal so that Judas might repent and turn his heart to him (6:70,11:9,13:10). Despite Jesus’ prayer and effort for him, Judas didn’t repent. He was going to betray Jesus.

If we are in the same situation as Jesus was, we are so hurt, disappointed, and even angry by Judas’ betrayal. We may blame those who are going to betray us and revenge them even before they betray us. Some may not control their anger by saying, “How could he do that to me?” “What’s wrong with them so that they turned against me?” Still, others become frustrated and suffer from self-condemnation by saying, “Why did this thing happen to me? What’s wrong with me?” We react many ways from the betrayal of our friends, families, co-workers, leaders and so on.

Jesus could have dealt Judas’ betrayal emotionally if he saw it from human point of view. Someone might say that Jesus’ love for Judas was useless and his discipleship ministry failed. Satan might have planted doubt in Jesus’ heart saying, “If you are the Son of God, how could you not help Judas to be converted?” “If you are the Son of God, save Judas first before you save the whole world?”, and so on. When we are in the same boat with Jesus, self-condemnation which is provoked by Satan makes us difficult, too. In this way our pain increases to double from within and without.

How did Jesus deal with Judas’ betrayal? How did he see this trial at that time? Jesus saw his betrayal to fulfill the passage of the Scripture. Jesus saw Judas’ betrayal to fulfill God’s will for his redemptive purpose. Look at verse 18b. “*But this is to fulfill the passage of the Scripture. ‘He who shared my bread has turned against me.*” Jesus quoted Psalm 41:9, which says, “*Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me.”* Jesus found an answer from the Scripture. Jesus found a solution through the Bible. Jesus saw Judas’ betrayal from the view of God’s will. Jesus did not see his betrayal as Judas’ personal tragedy or the failure of his ministry. He did not see this negatively, but positively in fulfilling God’s will for world salvation. Jesus’ viewpoint to see the world was always God-centered, who will work all things for his good purpose.(Ro 8:28) In the past Jesus’ disciples saw the born blind man as the victim of someone’s sin, either his own sins or his father’s sin. (Jn 9:1-2) But Jesus didn’t see his blindness as the Karma of men’s sin, but as an opportunity to display the work of God. Jesus saw his blindness as a chance to glorify God’s name in his life. (Jn 9:3) Jesus’ viewpoint to see all things were positive under God’s divine sovereignty according his good purpose. Jesus did not see Judas’ betrayal as failure or loss, but as fulfillment of God’s word for world salvation. We need spiritual eyes and discernment to see all things with Jesus’ viewpoint so that we may overcome betrayal, sense of failure, and all kinds of negative and dark forces from the evil. Amen!

There were other reasons why Jesus foretold Judas’ betrayal. Look at verses 19-20.“***I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am. 20Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me***.” Jesus believed that his disciples could remember his prediction about Judas’ betrayal so that they could believe in Jesus as the Son of God. Here, the words “I am who I am” is the same words as God introduced himself to Moses. (Ex 3:14) Jesus wanted his disciples to believe in him as the Sovereign God of omniscience who knows their future, present, and past, and the God of omnipotent who make all things good for his glory. When the disciples remembered Jesus’ words, they believed that even Judah’s betrayal was to fulfill the Scripture and the will of God.

Look at verses 21-30. “***After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, “Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.” His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, “Ask him which one he means.” Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him, “What you are about to do, do quickly.” But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor. As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.***” In these verses Jesus gave a piece of bread to Judas after he dipped it in the dish. In the Middle East sharing a piece of bread is the expression of hospitality and courtesy for their guests. Jesus provided a chance for repentance to Judas to the end. Jesus pointed out directly in detail who was going to betray him. Still, his disciples did not understand what Jesus said and Judas did not repent. When he did not accept Jesus’ love, he became a tool of Satan. Verse 30 describes Judas’ departure as his tragic destiny.

Second, a new command (31-35) Judas’ departure left mixed feelings to his disciples. Some might realize his betrayal. Others might be still in confusion and bewilderment. Still, others might be filled with fear. We may also show various responses when someone who has been with us leaves us suddenly. In this critical moment what did Jesus do for his disciples? Jesus glorified God the Father. Verses 32 is Jesus prayer to God the Father through him and in him. ***“When he 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.” (32)*** How could Jesus glorify God the Father? How could God be glorified in the Son Jesus? Jesus glorified God through his obedience for the will of God the Father. Jesus glorified Him through his death on the cross and resurrection. Through Adam’s disobedience God’s name was defiled. Through Jesus’ obedience God’s name is glorified.

When things do not go as we expected and when we confront uncontrollable situation, let us find to way by pleasing God. Seek him and glorify the name of Jesus all the more than before we meet challenges. Two decades ago our church confronted a big challenge within and without. There were divisions among churches and persecutions from outside. What we could do at that time was to pray, to trust in God, and to work harder all for the glory of God. All church members became one and praised Jesus by singing not only “Hallelujah”, but also all songs from Handel’s Messiah. The heart of Jesus’ disciples was troubled. But Jesus overcame this by glorifying God the Father.

Jesus was like a loving mother who takes care of her remaining children before she leaves. Jesus said, “***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.”*** (33) In this verse Jesus mentioned his impending arrest and trial. This is the way of cross which his disciples could not follow at that time. Jesus gave them a command as a mother asked her lovely children. Let us read verses 34,35. “***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.”***

Jesus gave a new command to his disciples? What was the old command? It was ‘eye for eye and tooth for tooth.’ (Mt 5:38) It was to revenge those who hurt us and strike them two times when we were stricken one time. According to this old command Jesus’ disciples might have dealt with Judas the betrayer and condemned Peter the denier. Based on the old law they could have retaliated to those who hurt them. But Jesus gave them a new command: Love one another. Jesus showed them how to love one another by washing their feet. By forgiving other’s sin, even the sin of their enemies, by forbearing other’s weaknesses, and by forfeiting the record of their wrongdoings. Jesus asked us to wash other’s dirty feet as he did for his disciples. Loving one another is not an option, but a command. It is not a matter of choice, but of obedience. It was not easy for me to wash one person’s feet because of my pride and selfishness. Even while writing this passage, Satan accused me of condemnation and hesitation. But I must obey Jesus’ command. It is not a matter of my choice, but of my humble obedience. Please pray for me and pray for all of us to love one another by washing each other’s feet, between husband and wife, between children and parents, between co-workers, neighbors, friends, relatives, and so on. Jesus said, “*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

Third, Peter’s denial (36-38) Look at verse 36. “***Simon Peter asked him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus replied, “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.” Peter asked, “Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” Then Jesus answered, “Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”***

Jesus gave Peter a new command. But Peter’s concern was not in Jesus’ command, but in Jesus and his own security. He claimed his loyalty for Jesus even to point of his death. Still, Jesus predicted Peter’s denial. Jesus predicted that Peter would deny himself three times before the rooster crows. Jesus knew Peter’s weakness and wanted to protect him from Satan’s accusation when he came to realize later. Indeed when Peter remembered Jesus’ words of his denial, he wept bitterly. (Lk 22:62)

God knows our weaknesses. Still, God loves us. God loves us because what we did, but because who we are. He loves us because we are his precious children. Yesterday one man asked me how we are sure of our salvation. I said, “God sent his one and only Son to die for our sins. Who am I and who are you before God? Do we deserve for Jesus’ death on the cross? Are we good enough to claim our righteousness? How can it be that God sacrificed his Son for me and for you the sinners?”

We are weak, but God is strong. Our love and loyalty for Jesus are weak, but Jesus’ love for us is strong. We are easily changed and broken, but Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. We come to him with confidence and freedom. This is because God knows our weaknesses and is ready to wash our feet and glorify his name in us and through us. Let us love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength and love one another as Jesus have loved us. Amen!