



## May 19, 2019 - A New Commandment: Loving Love Given by Rev. Mattei

[Jn 13:31-35](#)

It is fascinating to make eye contact with a baby, smile or make faces and see the baby repeat the same expressions. Discovered in the early 1990s by Italian scientists, mirror neurons are a type of brain cell that tends to replicate an action observed in another individual. We learn new behaviors through observation and mimicry. The study of mirror neurons helps us explain not only how and why we tend to repeat an action we see performed (a smile or a yawn) but also how and why we feel attuned to other people's mind and even feel empathy for them. The researchers are convinced that the study of "mirror neurons might help explain not only empathy but also autism and even the evolution of language."<sup>1</sup> We learn by imitating.

During his last meal with the disciples, Jesus introduces his farewell speech with a ritual that in the Jewish cultural tradition and economy, children or slaves do to house guests: the washing of his disciples' feet. It was proof of his love for them, an example of service they were supposed to follow ([Jn 13:1-15](#)). During the same speech, he announces that one of his disciples will betray him ([Jn 13:16-30](#)). That betrayal triggers Jesus and God's glorification ([Jn 13:31-32](#)): pure Goodness shines through like Love over evil ([Ex 33:17+](#); [Ex 34:5-8](#); [1 Jn 4:7-21](#)) and Light over darkness ([Jn 1:1-3](#); [1 Jn 1:5-7](#)). Jesus will be gone soon and where he is heading, namely to the cross and his death, his disciples cannot follow (for now). In the meantime, they receive a new commandment, to love one another. This is a big bill: radical, mutual, untiring, unconditional and self-sacrificing love, the kind of love Jesus has demonstrated, is the mark of discipleship. But can we love the way Jesus loved?

Through the foot-washing, Jesus has acted out his radical and humble dedication to humanity and has modeled for us the kind of behavior that gives life. Like the foot-washing, his death "cleanses" his disciples and gives them communion with him, and when in our love of others we wash their feet we go through the self-discovery, self-acceptance, self-renunciation and self-

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.apa.org/monitor/oct05/mirror>

dedication Jesus went through. Renouncing the social construct of worldly honor and the damaging intoxication of power over, Jesus has unmasked the elusive pretense of greatness at the expense of others. Dying to the ego in total transparency and vulnerability, he has demonstrated the true power that frees one for pure and profound love, a love that invites mutuality and builds community; a love that elevates the other and honors diversity, tears down barriers and creates connection; a love that is generous and compassionate, unifies spirits, relates to others as subjects and not as objects<sup>2</sup>, honors and respects people, heals them, and makes them feel safe.

We were created by Love for the purpose of loving Love. We come to full expression of self when we honor God by loving what God loves. Thus, Love can only be pure Love when it flows from self to Other and enters into a relationship with the Other. Or it risks to become narcissism, love reverted onto self. Love is constantly moving out of self and flowing towards others. Our human journey is to discover ourselves in relationship, and affirm our individuality in relation to others. In so doing we grow psychologically and spiritually, and become fully ourselves. We mature into the person God has in mind for us to become: the fullness of Christ ([Eph 4:11-13](#)) expressed in our trust and desire to come closer to God and serve others. We were made for Love, but somewhere along the path, we lost our connection with God. University of Houston research professor, Brene Brown, reflects:

*All of [the] pretending and performing – [the] coping mechanisms that you’ve developed to protect yourself from feeling inadequate and getting hurt – has to go. Your armor is preventing you from growing into your gifts. I understand that you needed these protections when you were small. I understand that you believed your armor could help you secure all of the things you needed to feel worthy and lovable, but you’re still searching and you’re more lost than ever. Time is growing short. There are unexplored adventures ahead of you. You can’t live the rest of your life worried about what other people think. You were born worthy of love and belonging. Courage and daring are coursing through your veins. You were made to live and love with your whole heart. It’s time to show up and be seen.*<sup>3</sup>

If it is true that we were created in the “image and likeness of God” ([Gen 1: 26-28](#); see also [Gen 5:1-3](#)), then when we look at ourselves and each other we ought to be able to recognize God in all of us. But our disconnect from ourselves and God, what we call sin, has blurred that mirror and the image is distorted. Although God’s imprint is in us, the *image* is not so readily evident

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (Touchstone, 1970).

<sup>3</sup> <https://brenebrown.com/articles/2018/05/24/the-midlife-unraveling/>

because there is a spiritual gap that needs to be filled: God's *likeness* needs to be revealed. And that is the work of a disciple who, filled with the Spirit, follows Jesus in his footsteps. In his love of God and us, Jesus chose a way of humility, simplicity, and vulnerability to get closer to us and show us the Way. The Way of self-emptying is the Christ model as an ancient hymn describes:

5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
6 who, though he was in the form of God,  
    did not regard equality with God  
    as something to be exploited,  
7 but emptied himself,  
    taking the form of a slave,  
    being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
8 he humbled himself  
    and became obedient to the point of death—  
    even death on a cross.  
9 Therefore God also highly exalted him  
    and gave him the name  
    that is above every name,  
10 so that at the name of Jesus  
    every knee should bend,  
    in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
11 and every tongue should confess  
    that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
    to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:5-11).

The eternal life or salvation Jesus has come to give us is the ability to acknowledge true Love and remaining in Love. Our true self blossoms and matures when, connected to Love, we reflect Love. The choice to remain open, vulnerable, transparent, humble, in other words, to keep our defense mechanism down will allow the Spirit to work in us and through us and his message of peace will become more evident. *Self-sufficiency is an obstacle to a genuine encounter with the Other!* That's why Jesus showed up in this world as a naked, vulnerable one, a defenseless baby lying in the place where animals eat and died naked on a cross (contrary to all attempts to depict him wearing a loincloth). Franciscan priest, Richard Rohr, reminds us that "Naked vulnerability means I trust you, I'm going to let you influence me; I'm going to allow you to change me. The Way of Jesus is an invitation to a way of living, loving, and relating—on earth as it is in heaven. We are intrinsically like God, living in absolute relatedness. To choose to stand outside of this flow is the deepest and most obvious meaning of *sin*. We call the Flow *love*. We really were made for love, and outside of it, we die very quickly."

What Jesus intends by “eternal life” must be found in the connection with Love in the present moment, in the “this-ness” of life, in how I live this moment. What is required is simple surrender, generous availability and childlike trust that the one speaking is the one sent by God ([Jn. 5:24](#); [6:40-47](#); [17:3](#)). Let’s make the leap of faith and see where his voice leads us; in that journey we will find ourselves in God and it will be joy forever.

We look at Jesus and his sacrificial love for us, and if our (spiritual) sight is not impaired, we repeat what we see. He leads as the Good Shepherd he is, and we, the sheep of his fold, mimic him by following in his footsteps. He loves the last, the least and the lost, and filled with his Spirit, we do the same. He climbs on a cross for love of us and we do the same for the sake of the world. He looks at us and sees a Child of God. Then he smiles and we are pleased. We smile back and in his eyes, we see us reflected in a tender expression. Could it be that he is crazy for us? In his eyes, we see an image of us. Do we see what he sees? Do we see mercy, compassion and deep love in those eyes? Are we able and willing to do the same to ourselves? To others?

Let us love one another as he has loved us...until the end.