I came across a cute story in an old Readers Digest a little while ago, I often wonder why I remember these stories, but I always seem to find a place to use them, so I would like to share this one with you this morning.

A little boy wanted to meet God. Not knowing where God lived, the boy packed his suitcase with Twinkies and a six-pack of root beer and started out on his journey. When he had gone a few blocks, he met an old woman who was sitting in the park staring at some pigeons. The boy sat down next to her and opened his suitcase. He was about to take a drink of one of his his root beers when he noticed that the old lady looked hungry, so he offered her a Twinkie.

She accepted it and smiled at him. Her smile was so pretty that the boy wanted to see it again, so he offered her a root beer. Once again she smiled at him. The boy was delighted! and they sat all afternoon together. As it started to get dark, the boy realized it was time to go home, but before he had gone more than a few steps, he turned around and ran back to the old woman and gave her a hug. She gave him her biggest smile ever. When the boy opened the door to his own house a short time later, his mother was surprised by the look of joy on his face.

She asked him, "What did you do today that made you so happy?" He replied, "I had lunch with God." But before his mother could respond, he added, "You know what? She's got the most beautiful smile I've ever seen! Meanwhile, the old woman, also radiant with joy, returned to her home. Her son was stunned by the look of peace on her face and he asked, "Mother, what did you do today that made you so happy?" She replied, "I had Twinkies and root beer with God, and you know, he's much younger than I expected."

John 13:31-35 is part of Jesus' farewell speech to his disciples. It takes place on the night before his crucifixion, and he is giving his disciples final instructions for continuing his work, just like many of you might have given final instructions to your families. Many of you have also provided instructions for loved ones at other points in your lives. For example, if you went away on trips you likely gave instructions to other people for picking up your mail, checking on your homes or mowing your lawns.

Hopefully most of you have also prepared wills in which you give instructions about how your estate is to be dealt with after you are called home. In John 13:31-35, Jesus is teaching his disciples about humility, acceptance and love. This particular passage occurs just after Jesus has washed the disciples' feet, and after Judas has left to betray him. Judas' departure began the process by which Jesus was glorified by God. Jesus knew that Judas' actions would result in victory over sin and death, but the disciples didn't realize it even though Jesus told them several times that he would die and rise again.

Jesus was their source of comfort and strength, but he knew that they would have to learn to support each other after he returned to heaven. That's one reason why he issued the commandment to love one another. It is also the new commandment that we as his modern disciples are to follow. Jesus told the disciples that he will be glorified through his death and resurrection. His death and resurrection opened the door of salvation for us. Before we can walk through that door, we have to obey God's commandments, including the new one Jesus introduces in his farewell speech, love each other just like I have loved you.

This commandment is not entirely new. The Israelites were told in Leviticus 19:18 to love their neighbours, and Leviticus 19:34 told the Israelites to love both foreigners and fellow Israelites. This commandment however, is new for four reasons. **First,** Jesus was a clear model of the love he requires, and he proved that by washing the disciples' feet. **Second**, the commandment focuses on the Christian community. We are called to love everyone, friends, enemies and total strangers.

**Third**, it creates a new covenant based on love and not obedience to all of the Jewish laws. **Fourth**, this new commandment is open ended. There is no end to the requirement, so we can never say that we have obeyed it entirely. Even if we can't feel affection for someone, we can still help them, and when we do, we show Christ's love. In his book "Miracle on the River Kwai", Ernest Gordon described an incident in which British prisoners of war tended the wounds of injured Japanese soldiers and fed them. The Japanese soldiers were covered with mud and blood.

Their wounds were infected and they were left uncared for by their own people. The British prisoners saw them, took pity on them, bathed their wounds and gave them a little food to eat. They cared for their enemies who starved and beat them and killed their comrades, but God broke down the hatred and conquered it with love.

The life Jesus calls us to live is a life as a servant of others. We love our neighbours when we seek them out. We love our neighbours when we make ourselves available to serve them, we love our neighbours when we shepherd them in their walk with the Lord and teach them His Word.

I love to tell the story about serving one of our neighbours across the street. They are a mother and daughter from the Philippines. I have often helped them by snow blowing their driveway after large snow storms. After one particular storm, I was walking down the street to the grocery store when the man who owns the house about six doors away from these ladies shouted out to me and asked why I cleared the snow for the two ladies.

My answer was, just to help them in Christian love. The man replied “ but they are Philipino’s”, so what, I said, God loves us all and we are called to do the same. He walked away cursing me. To this day if I walk by this man’s house and he is outside, I shout out to him “remember Jesus loves you as well”.

Jesus' humility and service to others, especially when he washed the disciples' feet, is a good example for us to follow. Here was the Master serving others, and not the other way around. If Jesus could serve others, so can we. He showed his love for others by serving them. If he can love others by serving them, we can also love others by serving them.

We don't have the option of ignoring this new commandment. Obeying it is a sign of our love for Jesus. It requires us to throw ourselves on God's mercy. It's hard for us to love others as Jesus commanded because it goes against our human nature. It goes against human reasoning and logic. It's not logical for us to love our enemies or those who hate us. It's not logical to love people who are different from us, or at least that's what the Jews thought. They did not want to love the Gentiles.

In fact, the Jews often referred to the Gentiles by names that were rather uncomplimentary, such as "dogs". We are told that God showed Peter in Acts 11:18, that he loves the Gentiles as much as he loves the Jews, and to refuse to accept the Gentiles would be hindering God and opposing his will. When we find it hard to love our enemies or those who are different from us, all we have to do is remember what Jesus did for us.

I will close with a little reminder. All we have to do to respond to what Jesus did for us is to obey His commandment, love our neighbours just like Jesus loves us.

AMEN