

Love  
*not* ~~HATE~~

# *Daily devotional*

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**READINGS AND PRAYERS FOR  
SUFFERING CHURCH ACTION WEEK 2018**

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**barnabasfund**  
hope and aid for the persecuted church

 **Suffering Church  
Action Week**

# Love one another

John 13

## INTRODUCTION

Jesus is at the end of His earthly life. The hour of His death is fast approaching. He is there with His disciples in the upper room, and He shares with them not only a common meal but also a message that comes from His very heart. The message of comfort and encouragement was rooted in His love. And it is for all of us who love and follow Him.

John records the inner motivation that determined the actions of our Lord (John 13:1). Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end, to the uttermost extent of love. He, the supreme Lord of Glory, the Creator and Sustainer of the world, the culmination of all things, at the hour of His death is filled with love. And yet, as John tells us in chapter 15 verse 25, Jesus, taking words from the psalms speaks of those who hate Him without a reason or cause (Psalm 35:19; 69:4). He loved and yet was hated in return.

He tells His disciples that the world will hate them too, just as it hated Him (John 15:18). But their lives must be founded on love. "As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34). By this love, He told them, the world would know that they belonged to Him and were truly His disciples.

The meditations in this booklet speak of the supremacy of Christ's love. In situations that could overwhelm a person and cause bitterness, cynicism, selfishness or aggression, the love of Christ triumphs.

SUNDAY 4 NOVEMBER

# The supremacy of Christ's love

John 13:1

*The* date is Thursday 14th Nisan. The place is Jerusalem – a large upstairs room, where an evening meal is in progress (Luke 22:12).

But Thursday evening is the beginning of Friday, according to the Jewish view that a day begins at sunset. The Passover lamb had been killed in the afternoon, and now Jesus and His disciples were gathered in the upper room, where everything had already been prepared, to eat the Passover meal together.

John, who was there, tells us that "having loved his own who were in the world" Jesus now showed them the full extent of His love. What John actually wrote, in Greek, is that He loved them to the completion of love itself. The rendering in some English translations, which says that He loved them to the end, is inadequate.

For the love of Jesus has no end; it has no limits.

Jesus, knowing the weaknesses of His disciples and of all humanity, possesses a love which transcends that which is natural. His love is a divine love that constantly reaches out to His

disciples, despite their frailties, their weaknesses, their inadequacies, their mistakes. The hymn writer S.T. Francis expressed it well: "O the deep, deep love of Jesus, vast, unmeasured, boundless, free, rolling as a mighty ocean in its fullness over me. Underneath me, all around me, is the current of Thy love – leading onward, leading homeward to my glorious rest above."

John is writing of this love, the love that Jesus had for His disciples. It was a love that nothing could extinguish, a love so pure that nothing could pervert it, a love that could never embrace bitterness or hatred, a love that was uncompromising, unconditional. With this love, the Lord embraced His disciples.

*What love is this,  
As strong as death,\* that cannot end,  
And reaches limitless,  
across the universe,  
Embracing all, and even me?  
A love divine, a matchless love,  
The deep, deep love of Jesus.*

\*(Song of Songs 8:6)

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MONDAY 5 NOVEMBER

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# Love in the face of death

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John 13:1

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Jesus is about to face the agony of Gethsemane and the horror of Calvary – His hour had come. The “hour” speaks of His impending death. He had loved them in life; now He was going to love them in death. He loved to the full, to the very totality of love itself.

In the face of death, it is easy to become cynical, angry and despairing. Yet, Jesus, knowing that He would soon die in terrible agony, faces what is to come with hope and expectation, and with a heart that remained full of love.

Birth and death are the only certain things in life. We have entered this world and we shall leave it. For many people, death is a fearsome thing. It is the entrance to an abyss, to the great unknown, where all seems lost.

Jesus’s departure from this world would take place in excruciating pain. He would be cruelly beaten, nailed to a cross and hung on a tree of shame. And above all else, in that act of dying He would take upon Himself

the sins of humankind and experience that ultimate separation from the Father’s love.

But the perfect love of Jesus cast out all possibility of fear. He willingly embraced death knowing that it was not final, that the Father’s love would bring Him back from the dead, that He would rise from the grave triumphant.

So Jesus could love in the face of death. And He has called His disciples ever since to embrace the martyr’s death, which many Middle Eastern Christians welcome as an honour and a privilege, calling it a “second baptism”.

“The blood of the martyrs is to the church as water to a garden,” said John Chrysostom (died 407 AD)

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*What love is this  
That triumphs in the face of death  
Unconquered, undefeated?  
Through agony of soul and body,  
Emptied of anger or bitterness,  
This love overflows.*

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TUESDAY 6 NOVEMBER

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# Love in the face of betrayal

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John 13:2

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Judas, prompted by the devil, would soon go out and betray Jesus. The devil had already put the thought of betrayal into Judas’ heart but we do not know how much earlier that had happened. John writes this Greek sentence with Judas’ name at the very end, so the reader is held in suspense – whose heart is it that has received such a terrible thought from the devil? Finally it is revealed: Judas Iscariot, son of Simon.

Friend has turned into foe. With a kiss he will betray Jesus, the one who loves him. Many Christian leaders know what it is to be betrayed, even by close colleagues. They know the disillusion, shock and hurt. After freedom came to Romania, a pastor examined the file which the authorities had kept on him during the years of Communist rule. He found that his assistant pastor had been systematically informing on him and his wife for years.

Jesus knew what Judas was going to do. Yet Jesus loved Judas, and

continued to love him. He loves to the full, to the end.

Judas – and the devil – must have thought that they had Jesus in their power, but in reality Jesus had them in His power. For Jesus was aware that the Father had put all things under His power (v.3). He knew that the time had arrived for Him to leave the world and go to the Father (v.1). He was fully conscious of His power and that He, of His own will, had come from God, and now, of His own will, was going back to God. This loving Jesus is the sovereign eternal Son who descended from God for His supreme mission and now returns to the Father, His mission achieved.

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*What love is this,  
Welcoming the kiss  
Of friend turned foe,  
Embracing the traitor  
In his act of treachery?  
Love of the betrayed for the betrayer.*

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WEDNESDAY 7 NOVEMBER

# Love in the face of selfishness

John 13:3-17

Jesus loves in the face of selfishness. He stoops to the lowly task of washing the dirty feet of His disciples, while they watch in amazement and seemingly without any contrition for their pride and selfishness. None of them moved to assist Jesus in His foot-washing task. They were preoccupied with themselves and their personal dignity.

John describes, in wondering detail, the selfless love of Jesus as He strips Himself of His outer clothing, takes basin and towel, and bends to wash and dry their feet. What love is this that the Lord of Glory engages in the acts of a servant? As Jesus had told them a few days earlier, "even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

Peter refused to have his feet washed; it is a very emphatic sentence in the original Greek. He would neither wash Jesus' feet nor let Jesus wash his feet. Was this humility or pride? Then, when he realised it indicates his belonging

to Jesus, he wanted his hands and head washed too. Humility or pride? Peter had to learn the selflessness of receiving, which can be more difficult than giving. He had to quell his pride and accept his continual need for repentance and for the cleansing that only Jesus can bring.

A Christian from seventeenth-century England explained the meaning of the term "lovers of themselves" (2 Timothy 3:1-4) by comparing a selfish person to a hedgehog. The hedgehog rolls itself up into a ball, so there are only sharp spines facing the outside world, while at the same time there is nothing but softness and warmth on the inside for itself.

*What love is this  
That serves the selfish  
In their wondering pride?  
Stripped of all, with towel and basin,  
Love stoops to wash,  
And then to give His life.*

THURSDAY 8 NOVEMBER

# Love in the face of personal ambition

Luke 22:24

Jesus loved His disciples in the face of their vaulting ambition and avarice of power. So focused were they on their own status that they saw only themselves, clothed in robes of splendour and wielding the orb and sceptre of authority. Yet Jesus, knowing where He had come from and where He was going, and holding all things in His hands, was among them as one who serves (v.27). He, the supreme source of all life, is filled only with love for His disciples who thought so highly of themselves and yet were nothing but grass that withers and flowers that fall (Isaiah 40:6-8).

Luke tells us that, during this Passover meal, a dispute arose amongst the disciples as to which of them was considered to be the greatest. In fact, that Thursday evening was not the first time that the disciples had argued over this question. Some days earlier, on their way to Jerusalem, the other ten had become indignant with James and John when they discovered the two

brothers had asked Jesus privately if they could sit on His right and left hand in the Kingdom (Mark 10:35-45). At that time too, Jesus had taught them that "whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant; and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all".

The disciples were consumed with power and position. They were taken up with who would be the leader, who would exercise authority, to whom would everyone else look up? Their concern was greatness, not service.

None of the disciples wanted to lower himself to serve the others; they competed to be the greatest. Yet Jesus loved them, to the full, to the completion.

*What love is this  
That the Creator of the universe,  
Emptied of His power and glory  
Comes amongst the earthly proud,  
The vain, ambitious, status-seekers,  
As One who serves?*

FRIDAY 9 NOVEMBER

# Love in the face of denial

John 13:38

Jesus loves in the face of denial. Jesus tells His disciples that He will soon be leaving them (v.33). Peter, refusing to accept that he cannot go too, declares, "I will lay down my life for you." (v.37) Jesus tells Peter that before the rooster crows the next morning, Peter will have denied three times that he knows Jesus.

Later that night Jesus was arrested, and Peter followed Him to the High Priest's house. There, as he stood by the fire to warm himself, a servant girl challenged Peter, asking if he was one of Jesus' disciples. "I am not," said Peter and repeated his denial twice more when others asked him the same question.

This was the same Peter who, a few hours earlier, had pledged himself to die for Jesus. Yet now he spurns his Master's love, denying that he has any relationship with Jesus.

The history of Christianity has shown again and again that there are some who have been true and faithful even

unto death and others who chose to deny Christ to save their lives. In the Great Persecution under the Roman Emperor Diocletian (at its worst 303-305 AD) countless Christians were martyred, while many others denied Christ and thus survived to enjoy the religious liberty that was ushered in by the Edict of Milan in 313. Many of these apostates then wanted to rejoin the Church.

Many Christians today are faced with a stark choice: to deny Jesus, thus saving themselves and their families, or to embrace Him, thus embracing death and the sacrifice of all they hold most dear on earth.

Will we be true to Jesus or will we deny Him in the hour of temptation?

*What love is this  
That, though disowned, denied,  
By those who claimed to love Him back,  
Loves still with endless love?  
Loves fully though forsaken?  
This is the love that never fails.*

SATURDAY 10 NOVEMBER

# Love in the face of cowardice

John 13:38; Luke 22:31-32

Jesus knew that His disciples would all forsake Him at His time of greatest need. Even so He loved them. He knew that Peter – driven by fear for his own safety – was going to deny Him. The other disciples were going to flee, leaving Him desolate, friendless and alone. Yet He loves, to the full, to the end. Surely this was that "love to the loveless shown that they might lovely be" of which Samuel Crossman tells us in his hymn.

Was it cowardice that caused Peter to disown Jesus? Was it cowardice that caused His disciples to abandon Jesus in His hour of need?

The opposite of faith is not doubt but fear. The cowardly actions of the disciples were due to their lack of faith. That is why Jesus prayed for Simon Peter that his **faith** would not fail when the devil came to "sift" the disciples. He did not pray that Peter would have courage but that he would have faith, for faith brings courage in its train.

Jesus speaks of fulfilling the will of His Father. He saw with the eyes of faith that His life was in the hands of His Father. He wanted nothing more than to accept the divine will, and if that meant death He would willingly face it and embrace it.

Jesus kept on loving in the face of death, betrayal, selfishness, personal ambition, denial and cowardice. They let Him down, yet He continued to love those who gave Him such pain and sorrow.

Which of us would continue to love when confronted with even one of these behaviours? Which of us would not turn cynical, critical and cold? Yet Jesus' heart kept flowing out to others.

*What love is this  
That loves the bragging coward,  
Unlovely and unlovable,  
So soon to flee?  
This is the love unquenched  
by many waters,  
The love that never ends.*

# The new command to love

John 13:34-35

John writes of the unending love of Jesus, a love beyond comparison, a love that was willing to sacrifice itself not only for the disciples whom He called His friends, but for the whole world, to take away their sins.

There is a command, which some have called the eleventh commandment, that takes Jesus' disciples, both then and now, into an altogether different realm.

Jesus terms this a new command and it is simply that His disciples love one another as He has loved them. This very love for one another would show the world that they were His disciples. This conquering love, whose height and depth and length and breadth cannot be known, is what should fill the hearts and lives of the disciples, like a consuming fire.

"See how they love one another," commented the astonished North Africans who observed the lives of Christian believers around the year 200 in Carthage (modern Tunisia), and noted that they were even willing to die for each other.

Twen has been in prison in Eritrea for more than a third of her life. As well as enduring her own terrible beatings and torture, she has sometimes taken the punishment for other Christian prisoners who were very sick. This is the Christ-like love that amazes the world.

In John's first letter he writes repeatedly of this acid test of Christian faith – love for our Christian brethren (e.g. 1 John 2:9-10; 3:14-17; 4:20-21).

Perhaps we feel we cannot do this. But God, who can do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, can strengthen us through His Spirit in our inner being. He can fill us with His fullness so that we may know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge (Ephesians 3:16-20).

*What love is this  
That conquers all,  
A love commanded, love supreme?  
Beloved Jesus, teach us, fill us,  
So all may see  
That we are Yours, O King of love.*

*What love is this,  
As strong as death,\* that cannot end,  
And reaches limitless,  
across the universe,  
Embracing all, and even me?  
A love divine, a matchless love,  
The deep, deep love of Jesus.*

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That triumphs in the face of death  
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Patrick Sookhdeo

### International Headquarters

The Old Rectory,  
River Street, Pewsey,  
Wiltshire SN9 5DB, UK  
**Telephone** 01672 564938

**Fax** 01672 565030

From outside UK:

**Telephone** +44 1672 564938

**Fax** +44 1672 565030

**Email** [info@barnabasfund.org](mailto:info@barnabasfund.org)

### UK

9 Priory Row, Coventry CV1 5EX

**Telephone** 024 7623 1923

**Fax** 024 7683 4718

From outside the UK

**Telephone** +44 24 7623 1923

**Fax** +44 24 7683 4718

**Email** [info@barnabasfund.org](mailto:info@barnabasfund.org)

Registered charity number 1092935

Company registered in England  
number 4029536

For a list of all trustees, please  
contact Barnabas Fund UK at the  
Coventry address above.

### South Africa

Office 301, 3rd Floor, Eikestad mall, 43  
Andringa Street, Stellenbosch 7599

**Telephone** +27 21 808 1668

**Email** [bfsa@barnabasfund.org](mailto:bfsa@barnabasfund.org)

**Bank Account** First National Bank (FNB)  
Barnabas Fund NPC

**Account Number** 62722422756

**Branch Code** 210202

**Swift Code** FIRNZAJJ

### Australia

PO BOX 3527,  
LOGANHOLME, QLD 4129

**Telephone** (07) 3806 1076

or 1300 365 799

**Fax** (07) 3806 4076

**Email** [bfaustralia@barnabasfund.org](mailto:bfaustralia@barnabasfund.org)

### New Zealand

PO Box 27 6018, Manukau City,  
Auckland, 2241

**Telephone** (09) 280 4385

or 0800 008 805

**Email** [office@barnabasfund.org.nz](mailto:office@barnabasfund.org.nz)

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### USA

6731 Curran St, McLean, VA 22101

**Telephone** (703) 288-1681

or toll-free 1-866-936-2525

**Fax** (703) 288-1682

**Email** [usa@barnabasaid.org](mailto:usa@barnabasaid.org)

### Singapore

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PO Box 354, Bangor, BT20 9EQ

**Telephone** 028 91 455 246

or 07875 539003

**Email** [ireland@barnabasfund.org](mailto:ireland@barnabasfund.org)

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