

# Knowing the Commander's Intent

John 10:11-18

Friends, the theme of my message today is “Knowing the Commander’s Intent”. Many years ago in Canberra, I was speaking with one of the young fellow who was training at the Duntroon Academy, and he talked about this. He described it as the Doctrine of the Commander’s Intent; and it was very simple. He said, “Our people are trained so that if the commander is not present, or the commander is out of communication, we still know what to do, exactly as the commander wants us to do it.” So that even if the commander dies, and the next one dies, and the next one dies too, and you are the only one left, you *still* know what your commander was wanting you to do. And if you want a good example of that, Google for “Battle of Goose Green” in the Falklands’ War, and you get a beautiful example of how that works.

I then want to follow with a little story about the herds of deer that used to travel between Germany and Czechoslovakia. The deer used to roam through the forests from one side to the other. They were always moving, and they always had this freedom to move. Now, as you know, in 1945-46, an Iron Curtain descended on that border. It was five sets of wire, some of which were electrified; and what happened of course was that the deer on the German side could no longer move right through; so they came to the fence, then they moved along the fence, and then they went back towards West Germany. And the deer that came from the Czechoslovakian side got to the fence, and they could not get past, so they kept going on that side. Now in 1989, the Iron Curtain was removed. Twenty-five years later, only three deer had

ever crossed on way or another. They had the freedom to move, but somehow inherited from one generation to the other, psychologically that wall, that Curtain, that Iron Curtain was still in their hearts. So they still would come to the point where they had walked, and they would walk along that line and they would go back that way; and these ones would come this way, and come to that line and not pass it, and go back over that way! (It occurred to me this morning that if they were deer from that area of Germany and Czechoslovakia, they were probably Lutherans. *[laughter]* Perhaps I shouldn't have said that. *[laughter]*)

But my point is that there are sometimes barriers that exist in our thinking, in our hearts, that we cannot get across. And I wonder this morning if I might just address one of those, and see if something in your heart can change. Maybe I can do that.

Let's look at Matthew 22:34-40. This is a text that repeats in one form or another three times. It's in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

When the Pharisees heard that he [Jesus] had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." *[Mark and Luke add, '...with all your strength.']* This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'

Now I just want to ask two people that I have a vague connection with many years ago to come forward and help me. Neville and Heather? (I just want a couple that I sort of know, so I won't cause any distress.)

That verse that I just quoted, I know you know off by heart, because when I was in your parish, I taught in the tradition of the great pastors who were there before me. And every kid who went through Confirmation knows that verse.

So what if Jesus stood before Neville like this, and said, “Neville, I want you to love Heather in the way you love yourself.” How has he gone? *[laughter]* And Heather, if Jesus stands in front of you and says, “Heather, I want you to love Neville the way you love yourself.” How has she gone? ... He says ‘wonderfully’, she says ‘no’. *[laughter]*

But my question is this. Is that actually what Jesus would say to them as his disciples? I learned that command as well as you, and I lived that command because it was in my preaching. Do you know that in 2016-2017, Rosemary and I had the privilege of driving around Australia; and we went to 84 different churches over that period of two years. And do you know that in at least 80 of those churches, those verses were there somewhere. This is what’s there for Christians.

So now I want to change it. Did Jesus ever have a new commandment? Did Jesus ever say “A new commandment I give you”? So let me address them again.

“Neville, I want you to love Heather the way that Jesus has loved you in the first place.” Is that different?

There’s a world of difference! “Neville, I want you to love Heather the way I have loved you in the first place. Heather, I want you to love Neville the way that I have loved you in the first place.” It’s different! (Thanks, Neville and Heather.)

If I am called to love my Rosemary the way I love myself, that’s a human standard. But if I am called to love Rosemary the way Jesus has loved me in the first place, that’s entirely different. There’s a line there that we have crossed.

Here's the 'new commandment' text — and you know it. We *sing* it!

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. (*John 13:34*)

And the Gospel message this morning *five times* had the message that the way I love you is that I lay down my life for you. The love that Jesus holds in front of you and me is that love that says "Whatever it takes, I will do". Whatever it takes.

Let's go back to Matthew and Luke, because I want to add some emphasis:

... a lawyer asked him a question to test him. 'Teacher, which commandment **in the law** is the greatest?'

Now, you know John's Gospel: Law came from Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. The next little example is for the Old Testament people:

Love your neighbour **as you love yourself...**

That's the command they lived under. But for the followers of Jesus, a new covenant, with a new command:

My command is this — love each other **as I have loved you.**

Now I have a question. (I can't help these questions — they just keep coming to me.) And my question is this: which is the higher call? The call for me to love Rosemary as I love myself, or the call to love Rosemary as Jesus has loved me? Which is the easier of these to keep?

Most people would say that the second commandment is the harder one; but actually it's the easier. Here's why. Suppose I walk up to any

one of you and ask, “Do you know the love of Jesus Christ for you?” Yes? If you know the love of Jesus Christ for you, if you know that you are loved, *then you have the love of Jesus Christ within you!* And if you have the love of Jesus Christ within you, you must have the Spirit of Jesus Christ within you. And if you have the Spirit of Jesus Christ within you, then you must have the heart of Jesus Christ within you. Just think about that: if you have the heart of Jesus Christ, the love of Jesus Christ, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, then you know more clearly what is being asked of you.

If I’m asked “How do you love Rosemary as yourself?”, I’m not really sure. I’ve been married 47 year; but I don’t really know what it means to love Rosemary the way I love myself. But the moment that that picture of Jesus loving me gets into my mind, then I know much more clearly how I am called to love my wife. And if you know the love, then you have the capacity to live it. And in any case, if you get it wrong, what do you know? There’s forgiveness. We live in the forgiveness.

We could have several sermons to drill into this further; but my question now comes back to this text.

‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind’” (and with all your strength.) This is the greatest and first commandment.

So, how have you gone with that? Could we even measure it? My question is, does Jesus vary that command for his disciples? Don’t misunderstand me: I am *not* saying that the old commands are bad. The Law is good; but it can’t *make* you good. The Law is holy; but it can’t *make* you holy. So it’s there as a command that, with our human strength, we cannot fulfil.

But does Jesus change that command a little bit, in some way, for people who are his disciples? You see, when I ask that of people in congregations, they always look at me puzzled. Puzzled, because they're not sure about the answer. They know I am asking a question that there is an answer to, but they don't know quite what that answer is. So try this.

John 6:28:

Then they [the Jews – the scribes and Pharisees, in a very aggressive context] said to him, 'What must we do to perform the works of God?'

And there is an answer that they are expecting. They would expect him to say, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. And love your neighbour as you love yourself.' They expect him to adhere to that word that came through Moses. But that is not the answer that Jesus gives.

'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.' (*John 6:29*)

That text is an absolutely central summing up of the commander's intent, of the Lord's intent for us. Jesus looks at these representatives of the law of Moses who hold that Law in his face at every turn, and he says to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in the one whom God has sent."

Do you know that in John's Gospel, 75 times Jesus indicates to the people listening to him and to his disciples that the number one thing needed is faith in him. Seventy-five times the word "believe" is used.

- You'll remember that when Jesus speaks to Martha, he says "I am the Resurrection and the Life and those who live and believe in me will

never die and those who die and believe — they will live.” Then he says to Martha, “Do you believe this?”

- To the man who was born blind and was healed, Jesus says, “Do you *believe* in the Son of Man?” And he says, “I don’t know, Lord, who he is.” And Jesus says, “That’s me.” “I believe!”
- Nathaniel at the beginning the Gospel says to Jesus, “I know that you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel.” And Jesus says to him, “You believe!”
- The comment for Thomas at the end of the Gospel is “Thomas, you believed because you saw, but blessed are those who have not seen and yet *believe*.”
- And a verse that you all know and can recite from your Confirmation and your Sunday School: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever *believes* in him would not perish but have everlasting life.”

Seventy-five times in that Gospel, Jesus calls those who hear him to believe. One hundred and fifty times in Paul’s letters, he tells people that the number one issue is faith. Eighty times in Luke’s writing, he tells us that the number one issue is faith. And when we think back to that “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbour as yourself” — that’s what Jesus did! The Son of God and Son of Man lived it, absolutely, completely, fully, freely, on our behalf. What the choir sang for us in Psalm 15 this morning, or what you read in Psalm 119, or what you read in Psalm 1 or Psalm 24, where they talk about being in the presence of the Lord, being blameless, and having got it absolutely right — that’s not for me. That’s the law that only Jesus Christ could fulfil.

The number one issue for people who are followers of Jesus Christ in the new commandment is to believe and to trust. Remember John’s

Gospel? “He came to his own people and his own people did not receive him; but to those who received him, who *believed in his name*, he gave power to become the children of God.” The end of the Gospel: “There are many things to tell you about Jesus; but these things have been written so that you may *believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Messiah; and that by *believing* you may have life in his name.”

The commands under which I live, the commands under which you live, first and foremost — do I believe? Do I trust? Do I put all my eggs, so to speak, in trusting Jesus Christ for my life and salvation?

If I asked you “Would you renounce Jesus Christ?”, is there anything in you that wants to say “No” to Jesus? Not at all. But isn’t this the truth? That the very faith that he calls us to have, he gives to us in the first place. I only came to know Jesus Christ as my Saviour and my Lord because he drew me to the Father and he put that faith in there. No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. And in that gift of faith comes the gift of love as well. The love of God is poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who is given to us. Faith and love, faith and love: it’s gift. Look at this:

The Father ... has entrusted all judgement to the Son, so that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. Anyone who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him.

*John 5:22-23*

How do you and I honour the Father? See the plain words of scripture — this is the commander’s intent! Remember, John has been thinking about this for 30 years longer than anybody else. This is his last will and testament to the church, that we may know “how do I honour the Father?” By honouring the Son, and by loving as the Son loved. Honour the Father by honouring the Son. There are a few other verses that have this idea:

No one who denies the Son has the Father; everyone who confesses the Son has the Father also.

*1 John 2:23*

It all hinges on the sonship. The whole of Scripture comes down to this: “What will they do with my Son?”

So will I place that trust, and will I have my trust in that place? And it’s gift to me! As it is gift to you!

So the very high calling he puts in front of us, actually he gives us, inside us, the capacity to live it. The very high calling of loving as Jesus loved is placed in us, but the capacity to *deliver* that calling is placed within us as well.

We said a prayer this morning — I don’t know whether you noticed — in the Prayer of the Day, and it’s often part of the prayer after Communion:

Thank you, Father, for this precious gift of the body and blood of your Son. Let it strengthen our *faith* in him and our *love* for one another.

Faith and love.

If you were to read Ephesians chapter 1, or Colossians chapter 1, or Thessalonians chapter 1, you would see that when Paul gives thanksgiving to the Lord, the first thing he says is “I thank my God for you, because I have heard about your *faith* in the Lord Jesus, and because of your *love* for one another.” Faith and love go together all the time.

Everything about the commander’s intent for you and for me is to have *faith in Jesus Christ*, and to *love like Jesus loves* — and he made it possible in the first place. Amen.