

May 18, 2025

*"Everyone Needs to Know"*

Rev. Nick Hatch

John 13:31-35

Last July Minneapolis Metro Transit bus driver Jayne Arendt-Verhelst saw something that was surprising. Her bus was approaching an intersection and a woman standing in the middle of the street began waving her down. Even though the woman wasn't at a bus stop, Jayne broke policy and pulled over and let her board.

"When I opened up the door, that's when I really saw her," Jayne said. "I saw her from head to toe, and I was just like, wow."

The woman, who appeared homeless, wasn't wearing any shoes.

"I can't imagine what it's like walking around with bare feet on the hot pavement, and just, nobody sees you. She's just kind of invisible, you know?"

Once Jayne fully took in the moment, she stopped the bus and immediately took off her own shoes and gave them to the woman.

"I knew that you're not supposed to drive in your socks, it's a big no-no, but I couldn't help it," said Jayne.

Several riders witnessed this act of kindness, and one was especially deeply touched by it. Passenger Sarah Seldon, who had been homeless herself, knew how meaningful a simple kindness can be.

"It really, like, affected me because it was like, oh my gosh, she sees this woman," Sarah said.

Not long after this, Sarah visited Jayne to thank her for the act she showed to the shoeless woman that day. These two women quickly bonded over their own experiences of adversity and how simple kindnesses had helped them through. And they remain close friends to this very day. – CBS Evening News, Steve Hartman.

For the world, this story of kindness and generosity can be considered unusual. Many of us struggle to feel seen. Many of those in need remain invisible

But for those who call themselves Christian and live by Jesus words- this should not be unusual. Our generosity should be as effortless as the bus driver for Christ places people in our midst every day.

Our scripture today is kind of backwards: these chapters in John were part of our readings prior to Easter. But now we go back, back to before Christ's passion and resurrection, back to what Christ calls "The New Commandment."

One theologian says:

*"The newness isn't so much a matter of never having heard words like this before. It's a matter of the mode of this love, the depth and type of this love: love one another in the same way that I have loved you. Love is all about the other person. It overflows into service, not in order to show off how hard-working it is, but because that is its natural form. This is to be the badge that the Christian community wears before the watching world."* - N.T.Wright

Now that we have seen the nature of Christ's Easter love- the commandment truly is new to us.

Over this last year in confirmation, we have grounded our conversations in practices to prepare ourselves for the watching world. We have read the words and commandments of Christ to help shape our choices. And now today you are committing yourselves to belonging to a Christian community. Today you receive "A New Commandment" because today you are offering yourselves for a life full of kindness, of charity, of humility and service, study of scripture and prayer which will over time- change the core of your very being.

Yours will become the eyes of Christ. Yours will become his hands. Yours will be his feet. And the world desperately needs to hear God's message of hope. I pray the new "badge" you will now wear- is the garment of Christ for you are a disciple meant to be seen and meant to be heard. There is a power in you- a hope in you- a truth within you- wear it with humility and joy.

Thus, today is both a public event. Today is a celebration for the community to bear witness. And today is also a personal event - an intimate moment between you and your faithful Savior.

This is why when we confirm you, we read a scripture to you, in secret. Nobody here will hear this scripture except you and those closest to you while you kneel on this kneeler. This is a sign that Christ comes to us individually, uniquely, personally, and

intimately. The church participates with a holy silence, honoring your unique relationship with our living God.

Then we will read a prayer for you aloud, a blessing really, asking for God to be with you and challenge you and guide you in some special way. This prayer is read so that all may hear, all may join in the blessing, for we are a community of faith bound together as one body who serves the one Christ Jesus.

May today be an opportunity for God to open up the door and let the world see you! May today be such a surprising blessing that the Spirit opens up new doors inside of you- to see those who might otherwise go unseen, to befriend those who otherwise are invisible. You might have to break a few rules along the way to do the right thing: it's OK, the world doesn't always understand true kindness or acts of Discipleship. But God understands and give you the strength to carry them out. And, like the rich roots of our "Still Speaking Tradition" here in the UCC, may your words and actions impart the loving justice and humanizing kindness and compassion of Jesus the Christ who says:

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. – John 13:34-35*

Everyone needs to know this message, the message of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Amen!