

Fifth Sunday of Easter; May 15, 2022

+ John 13:31-35 +

“Love As Christ Has Loved You”

**After Judas left, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify the Son in himself and will glorify him at once.**

**“Dear children, I am going to be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.**

**“A new commandment I give you: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, so also you are to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have loved one another.”**

Can you imagine if the person you love most said, “I’m leaving, and you can’t come with me. I’m going where you can’t go.” Or course you find the thought of that tasteless and disturbing. It’s probably something you don’t even want to imagine. The fact that we do not want even to imagine it may help us estimate how Jesus’ disciples must feel when Jesus says, **“My children, I will be with you only a little longer...Where I am going, you cannot come.”**

Jesus tells them this in the Upper Room, while he celebrates the Passover with his disciples. It is now only hours before Jesus will be arrested. It’s just a day before he will die for the world’s sins. It is only a few days before he will rise triumphant and appear in victory to his disciples. But after that, just forty quick days after that, Jesus will ascend back into heaven. And his disciples can’t go with him; they won’t be able to see Jesus anymore. They will want to go, but not be able to; they will look for Jesus, but not find him.

How would you feel? How do you think they feel? Perhaps the first thought through the disciples’ minds – perhaps the first thought through our minds – would be: How do we go on living if you’re gone? What do we do now that everything will change? What do we do now?

One of the wonderful things about having a Savior who became a human being is that he knows firsthand how we feel. Jesus understands that this news is disturbing to his disciples. He knows they must be wondering, “What now? What do we do when you’re gone?” And because he understands their uncertainty, he tells them what to do: **“A new command I give you: Love one another.”**

That is what to do. That is how to carry on. That is how to live life, Jesus tells them: **“Love one another.”** Such a simple sounding sentence! Such an easy thing to say! But what a challenging command to carry out! Consider how Jesus’ disciples have bickered and battled in the three years they have followed him. Arguing about who was the greatest, about the meaning of Jesus’ words, about the purpose of his mission. Love for each other does not come naturally to Jesus’ disciples. They need a lesson in how to love one another.

And Jesus is that lesson in how to love, a living lesson, in the flesh, before their very eyes. He says: **“Just as I have loved you, so also you are to love one another.”** How do Jesus’ followers love each other? Just as Jesus has loved them.

Jesus speaks about his love for us. He talks about love. But that's not all he does. Jesus backs up his loving words with action. Jesus does not just say, "God so loved the world...period." He says, "God so loved the world...and he acted. He sent his Son to pay for its sins." Jesus does not just say, "God is love." He shows the love of God by giving up the throne of heaven and taking on human flesh. Jesus acts on his love. He lives a flawless life that his Father demands in our place, because we have not. He takes the punches and the insults and the thorns and the cross. Jesus does more than talk about his love for us. He acts on it.

And that is how he wants us to love each other. Words of love are one thing. And they are important. It is important to tell one another that we are concerned for each other, that we care for each other. But if that's all our love is, just words, then it's really a phony, empty love. St. John is in that Upper Room to hear this command. He has walked with our Savior. The next day he will stand beneath the cross and watch Jesus show love by shedding his blood and dying. St. John sees Jesus' love in action. And later he will write, **Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions...**

We know full well that some people are easier to show our love to than others. It is easy to help a person in need if he is our friend. It is easy to do a favor for a classmate who is popular and well-liked. It is easy to help someone who is down, if they helped us when we were down. It is not so hard to prepare a meal and do the dishes for a family that is getting along and pitching in. When we have warm feelings toward the other person, it is easy to put love on display with actions. But what about when our feelings aren't so warm?

What about serving dinner to a family of quarrelling ingrates? What about helping someone who turned his back on us? What about showing kindness to a classmate who is invisible to everyone else? What about showing love to someone who thinks of you as an enemy? What about a coworker is so annoying that you can hardly stand to be in the same room? How do we show love to people that we don't have good feelings for?

Well, can you imagine how Jesus must have felt about his disciples on this night before he died? He took them into the Garden, and asked them to watch and pray with him. He went away a short distance, and asked them to wait for him. When he came back, they were not watching and praying. They were asleep. Do you think Jesus had warm feelings for his disciples at that moment? How do you think he felt about them when they ran away from him and abandoned him? How do you think he felt about Peter when that rooster crowed?

No doubt Jesus was frustrated with his disciples; even angry with them. But he showed his love for them anyway. Despite their laziness and treachery, the next day Jesus went to the cross for them anyway. Jesus' love is not based on warm feelings. His love acts despite hard feelings; he shows love even to those who have let him down, abandoned him, and betrayed him.

And that includes us. Do you think Jesus has a warm feeling toward you when you ignore his commands, like the disciples in the Garden? When you keep your mouth shut about him when you should speak, like Peter? Of course not. But he shows us love anyway, in spite of how we have treated him. He keeps us in the Christian faith despite the times we have run from his Word; he forgives our sins despite our disobedience. This is Jesus' love: a love that insists on showing itself, no matter how undeserved it is.

So yes, Jesus' followers may get on each other's nerves. They may have personality conflicts. They may have histories of friction and disagreement. But loving each other as Christ has loved us means we show love even through hard feelings, even when we don't feel very fond of each other.

Of course, our world has much different rules for showing love. For one thing, our world would rather love with words than actions. It is easier just to send a greeting card or rattle off a few nice words or just to say "I love you," than it is to take the time to show it with deeds. And that's the way our world likes to show love. Just words. But that's not really love at all; not without actions to back it up. And our world likes to show love to friends, to the thoughtful spouse, to the considerate child, to the popular classmate. The people I feel warm about – those are the ones I'll love. But that's not Jesus' love. Christians must define love as Christ does, not as the world does.

But sometimes we do draw the same boundaries around our love as the world does. Just loving with words. Just showing love to the people we like, the people who have something to offer us in return. And that is why our Savior came into our world with his love, with real love: to forgive us.

When our Savior stopped to heal the demon-possessed and the blind, when he befriended prostitutes and the tax collectors, he was living a life of active love in our place. When he helped the helpless and befriended the friendless, it was for our sake, to make up for the times our love has been weak and worldly.

When Jesus went to the cross for his treacherous, disobedient disciples, despite how he felt about them, it wasn't just to die for Peter, James, John, Andrew, Thomas and the rest. It was also for us disciples here today. He showed us that saving love, despite the way our sins have angered and frustrated him. It is love that does not depend on feelings, but his own determination.

Jesus calls this command to love his way, with action, with determination that overrides hard feelings and emotions, a "new" command. In one sense, that command was very old. God has commanded people to love each other from the beginning. So how is Jesus' command to love one another "new"? One way this command becomes new is that from now on the disciples are to love in the shadow of Jesus' cross. They are about to see love in action on a whole new level, as no one ever had before. Another sense in which this command to love is new is that it now has a new purpose: **"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."**

There is a lot of talk in the Christian Church today about why it is so hard to get new people to come to church and learn about Jesus. Pastors sit through endless and repetitive workshops; churches hire growth gurus; still the pews stay empty. Why is it so hard even to get someone to listen to what we have to say about our Savior?

We should listen carefully to what our Savior says here. This is the most effective and least complicated outreach strategy for his people: **"Love one another."**

Loving each other with Jesus' kind of love is the way to show the world that we are different and we belong to someone and something special. Imagine if the world sees Christians loving each other with

actions, not just with words! Imagine if the world sees Christians showing active love toward one another even through hard feelings and personality conflicts! Then the world will know we were different. Then some in the world may even want to listen to what we have to say.

That was Jesus' plan. That's why Jesus gave this command to his disciples. "Show the world who you are by showing my love to each other: a love that works, that does, that acts, even when others are unlovable." And fellow Christians, we can do this. We can show Jesus' love to each other and show the world that we are his.

Because before he commands his disciples to love one another, Jesus says, **"God will also glorify the Son in himself and will glorify him at once."** Remember, Jesus is about to leave his disciples. He is about to go away. But he is going away to heaven – to glory – to the right hand of his Father – to rule over all things forever. Our Lord of love is reigning on high in heaven. He rules over all things, including our hearts. So he will fill our hearts with his love. Whenever we hear of the love he has shown us, Jesus comes into our hearts and fills them with that same kind of love – his kind of love, that then pours out of our hearts to one another.

Jesus lives. Jesus is glorified. Jesus reigns on high. He lives to fill our hearts with his love, so we show it to one another – and show the world that we belong to him. Amen.