

“Love One Another, As I Have Loved You”
John 13:31-35
Sunday, April 24, 2016
The Rev. Sharon Snapp-Kolas, preaching

Scripture. Prayer.

Opening.

In one classic Peanuts cartoon, Lucy stands with her arms folded and a resolute expression on her face. Charlie Brown pleads with her: “Lucy, you must be more loving. The world needs love. Make this world a better place, Lucy, by loving someone else.” At that Lucy whirls around angrily and Charlie goes flipping over backwards. “Look, you blockhead,” she screams. “The world I love. It’s people I can’t stand!”

Judas might agree with Lucy. The context of our gospel reading today is the Last Supper. Just before Jesus gives his commandment to “love one another,” Judas has left the dinner table to betray Jesus. After Jesus gives his teaching, he will predict Peter’s triple denial of him. Jesus is surrounded by well-meaning disciples who claim to love the world, but who continually act in ways that scream, “It’s people I can’t stand!”

You and I can relate.

I. Glory (vv. 31-32).

Neither Judas nor Peter understand Jesus’ definition of glory. In verses 31 & 32 Jesus speaks of his own death on the cross, of being glorified through sacrifice and humiliation. In those days, and in our present time, people do not associate glory with execution as a criminal. They do not associate glory with humiliation or servanthood or sacrifice. Glory is given to kings and military leaders and people with power. Glory is given to famous people, like Brad and Angelina, or political leaders, like Reagan or Obama, or computer whizzes, like Bill Gates or

Mark Zuckerberg. I'd name some sports figures if I followed sports... You get the point. We glorify people who are famous or beautiful or rich or powerful.

Even today, 2000 years later, no one grasps Jesus' definition of "glory." He tries to teach his disciples. And through the teachings handed down for centuries, he tries to teach you and me. His glory is not in anything the world has to offer. His glory is not about fame or wealth or beauty or power.

His glory is about serving others – washing feet, healing the sick, visiting the prisoner, serving the poor, loving the unlovable...dying on a cross, for his enemies as well as for his friends.

One scholar suggests that, "Jesus' words in verse 31 about his NOW being glorified are properly odd-sounding considering what had just happened in the fact that Judas had fled the upper room to go forward with his dirty business. How strange that upon predicting his betrayal and upon seeing his betrayer exit the room that Jesus feels somehow 'glorified.' No mother would claim that her parenthood had been fulfilled upon seeing her son get arrested for cocaine possession. No politician would declare victory upon seeing his country attacked by terrorists. Yet Jesus sees the specter of betrayal and loss and diminishment and so much else that is dire and yet feels glorified. Even in the glow of Eastertide we in the Church do well to remember what the true nature of glory is for us. We in the Church are not 'glorified' when we amass political clout, business influence, or power and glitz as the world reckons those things. The nature of our glory lies elsewhere in sacrificial love, in service, and, yes, even in laying down our lives for the sake of the kingdom if it comes to that." (Scott Hoezee)

The idea is simple. Jesus comes to us as a servant-king. He shows us, by his actions, and he teaches us, with his words. We are to be like him. Our goal in life, as Christians, is to lose

ourselves in service to others, because that's what Jesus did. Because he first served us, we are to serve others. We are to turn a blind eye to the glory-seeking of the world, because that's what Jesus did.

This is so counter to the way we operate as human beings. We are constantly seeking acclaim and affirmation, through awards and accolades and money and power. Jesus says, no, we are not to be of this world. We are to seek after loving others as he has loved us. He went to the cross for us. This is glory. This is love.

A very simple lesson. But very confusing, living as we do, in a glory-seeking world.

II. Little children (v. 33).

Continuing through the passage, we see in verse 33 that Jesus addresses his disciples as "little children." He comforts them and prepares them for the fact that he is leaving them for a time. They can't go with him now, but they will be with him again soon.

There's a beloved little story about a boy who's trying to learn the Lord's Prayer, and one night as he kneels by his bed, these words come out:

Our Father, who are in heaven

How do you know my name?

John R. Claypool offers a beautiful comment on this familiar story: "Such individualized affection will always remain a mystery to us mortals, and at the same time, let us never forget we're made in the image of that extraordinary love. And doing what Jesus did in loving each one he ever met as if there were none other in all the world is at least an ideal toward which we can reach even if it always remains utterly beyond our complete grasp."

Little children don't always know how to get along. They want things their own way. MY toy. MY mommy. MY chair. MY cookie. Everything is mine, mine, mine. Everything is

about me, me, me. We teach children how to share and how to be polite and how to get along with others in a civil society.

And yet, as adults, we forget these childhood lessons.

Jesus knows this about us. And so he addresses us, like a gentle, compassionate mother or father. He addresses us as his “little children,” in need of a lesson in love. And, little children, the biggest, most important lesson is this: “Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

I like Nathan D. Baxter’s story about being “the eldest of three very strong-willed boys.” It reminds me of my boys when they were growing up. Baxter writes, “When I was growing up we had all of the fights and arguments you can imagine of rambunctious boys. Sometimes our disagreements would get so intense we would go to mother to have our righteous indignation ratified. She would often say to us, ‘You boys go back and resolve it, but remember you are brothers.’ ‘But Mom,’ we would reply, ‘he took my ball; he said I was a liar.’ ‘Mom, he broke the rules.’ But all she would say was, ‘You boys go back and resolve it and, remember, you are brothers.’ It was eventually clear that what was most important to Mother was that we behave, in such a way that demonstrated our bond as brothers. This was even more important to her than our resolution (which she also expected).

“I think this is what God says to the church. ‘I know you have differences, but you must struggle to resolve them as brothers and sisters. This is what I expect of you because you are my children.’

III. Love (vv. 34-35).

I like this alternate translation of verse 34: “I have loved you in order that you also love one another.” I have loved you in order...in order that you also love one another. (Thomas H. Troeger, translation).

Love is not only something we should do. Love is embodied in Jesus. The more we align our lives with his Spirit, the more we become the love he embodies. We begin to embody that love within ourselves and within the community of the church. Jesus is the source of the love we cannot achieve on our own power.

“A number of years ago Henry Drummond wrote a classic sermon titled ‘The Greatest Thing in the World.’ He concluded his sermon by suggesting that if you put a piece of iron in the presence of an electrified field, that piece of iron itself will become electrified. And in the presence of that electrical field, it is changed into a magnet. As long as it remains in contact with that field of power, it will continue to attract other pieces to itself. We are like that piece of iron. In the presence of Christ, we experience his love and take on his likeness. We are changed, electrified by the Holy Spirit, to attract others to the same love of God that we experience.” (Lee Griess).

Jesus’ love commandment might better be described as a law of nature, or a law of “the way the Spirit works,” rather than as a commandment in the sense of a moral law that we “should” follow. I don’t know about you, but whenever someone tells me I “should” do something, I get a pit in my stomach, like when I was five years old and my mother told me I should wear my hair like a pretty little school friend, or I should be nice to my sister, even when she was being mean to me.

Jesus loves us into loving one another. It's not a "should;" it's just the way the Spirit works. The closer we get to Jesus, the more we love one another. It just happens.

Now you may be thinking, "Ah-ha! So, the 'should' is in the getting closer to Jesus. We 'should' get closer to Jesus, if we want to love one another."

Well...yes and no. Yes, we "should" get closer to Jesus. But Jesus really does the "getting closer" part, too. He reaches out to us. He seeks after us. He chases after us, before we even know we need him. He dies for us, because he loves us.

Yes, there are things we do in grateful response to his great love. Yes, there are things we do to share his love with others. But it's not a "should." It's a spiritual process that grows out of a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Closing

I like the quote from Margaret Guenther that appears in your worship bulletin this morning:

"We have confused the sentimentality of the Hallmark card with the deep, dark mystery of love that is manifested for us in the incarnate Christ. Yes, love can be warm, enfolding and sheltering. Yes, love can feel good. But love can also be strong and difficult. It can be an impossible challenge."

Love is hard.

Love is an impossible challenge.

Only through the power of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, can we love one another as He loved us. May we continue to grow in the deep, dark mystery of His love.

Amen.