

**Love One another. really.**

**Menno Mennonite Church**

May 15, 2022

**Purpose:** To recall the commandments given us as Jesus makes all things new

**Message:** As disciples, we are called clearly to active love first by the example of Christ.

**Scripture:** John 13:31-35 (I will read); Revelation 21:1-6 (please read)

**Synopsis:** It is never hard to say good bye. It was hard, too, for Jesus as he was taking his leave of those who would come after. Among the many things that Jesus could have said—watch out for the Pharisees, I *really* expect you to actually follow me to the cross, try you level best not to deny that you even know me—the command that he does give is among the most pertinent and difficult. Love each other. As I have loved you. Told them in the context of serving action, Jesus institutes in John supper this clear and present imperative. While the task of loving is not new, but is present though out the biblical story. What is new is the equivalence of God’s action in Christ with our action in the world.

It is worth asking, when we are given as we are to proving ourselves right, how then do we prove our selves also loving?

*John 13:31–35*

<sup>31</sup> When he had gone out, Jesus said,

“Now the Son of Man has been glorified,  
and God has been glorified in him.

<sup>32</sup> If God has been glorified in him,  
God will also glorify him in himself  
and will glorify him at once.

<sup>33</sup> Little children, I am with you only a little longer.

You will look for me;  
and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you,  
‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’

<sup>34</sup> I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.

Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

<sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,  
if you have love for one another.”

Saying goodbye is never easy. That is why we have so many euphemisms to avoid the actual wording and the finality it holds. We take great pains to say “see you later” or keep it casual and promising that you will talk soon. In a life of coming and going in a variety of places, leaving, even under the best of circumstances is a wrench that always cuts deeply. I remember visiting my grandmother over the last couple of decades of her life. She was fortunate to have fairly robust health through most of what turned out to be her century of life. As the single family of the extended family who lived away from the home farm in Indiana, she was not the same part of my daily life and living as she was my cousins, many of whom would connect several times a week well into adulthood. Living at a distance made visiting when I did happen to be back in the Midwest all that much more important, as did saying goodbye. I could not maintain with any realism the conceit that we do when we live in proximity to each other: that each leave taking was anything less than what it was: the hypothetical last parting on this side of heaven. Never being sure of the situation of health, nor my schedule of when I might pass that way again impressed on me to make the chances I did have count, and count well. As it happened the last in person conversation we had together was enjoying introducing her to her great grand children of my origin, and visiting with her about the world that she had see turn upside down around her. I was able to say what needed to be said because the illusion of temporary had been dismantled between us, and we could afford to speak what was on our minds. It was a stark way to visit, each time being the last; but it was also a liberation in the visiting where we could dispense with the polite and retain the important. Perhaps that is a gift we can all afford ourselves.

Our text this week takes us backwards in many regards. Here we are in Easter tide, and we revert to those difficult days proceeding the passion and resurrection that we have just celebrated. But we revisit the moment of Jesus saying his farewells to those gathered around him, those who had been and continue to be the center of his ministry on Earth. And here is Jesus, knowing that all things are his, as the scriptures tells us, knowing not only that which laid before him presently, but also that which was on the other side of the cross, and it is still hard for Jesus to say goodbye.

This parting, really the whole of chapter 13, is about constructing the way that they are to be going forward. Jesus starts the evening with an act of extreme hospitality and welcome, serving his friend in the role of the servant far more than the mean of the master. The supper is

over, the bread has been broken and cup offered. Judas has just left to get on with that which was his to do. Now it is time to say goodbye.

Just a brief sidebar if you will—one I just can't pass up. Note what I just said: here the order becomes particular. Judas leaves after the meal, after the washing of feet. Indeed, it is the words of the meal that invite him to go on and do what he must. But even the betrayer is served; even the one for whom it was better never to have been born is part of the taking of the body broken and the cup of the new covenant. It speaks volumes of the kingdom and the way within it that the founding rituals of the way of the Christian Church involve the most reviled person of all of Christendom (after all, how many Judases do we meet these days). Might this be something we would do well to sit with when we are making our decisions about who is worthy and who is not?

As I think about the happenings of that night of goodbyes and the days that follow after, I think there is significance in what we do not hear from Jesus. When he is on the cross, we do not hear him wondering where his friends have gotten off to. He complains of his thirst and struggles with feelings of abandonment, but from God, not his friends. He chided those with him the garden for their inability to stay awake with him. But throughout those long days does he speak to the disciples who went into hiding rather than journeying with him to Golgotha. We had called each one of them by name to drop everything and everyone and dedicate their lives to doing what he did and going where he went. But the message at this Seminole moment of all of human history and of the story of God and God's people has little to do with the death that was about to be suffered; it had everything to do with the life that they would continue to live: Love one another; the way that I have loved you.

My friends, life lies at the center of the Christian narrative. It is the life that we lead that changes everything, our deepest selves included. Jesus does not focus on death—his own or anyone else's. Rather he leaves them painting a picture of what it is to be in the kingdom of God, bound one to the other in the way that Jesus has inaugurated. Jesus' promise is not preconditioned on the eventuality of the sweet by and by, though it vests us into the realm of the eternal, but is rooted in the vision of hope that cannot die, and the way that is saturated, always with love. The Holy One is glorified through live lived in and of the Kingdom, facilitated by the sacrifices of the Cross, but not defined or limited by it. The glory comes not through the gory

horrific death, but through the diminished power of death to change our reality. Because we now live the life of the kingdom, and are held in the bounds of love, always.

Not that this is new, particularly. Throughout the biblical story we are time and again pointed to God as the God of the new. God makes all things new; eventually a new heaven and new Earth. God makes the people of God from the very earth. Our lives and our history demonstrate how much newness God brings to life, even when it we who have strayed. But this command of love does ring familiar and not so much new. The book of the Law is replete with the commandments to love—it is from here that Jesus rephrases them yet again. It is the way of being right with both God and neighbor, our highest calling. So then if the way of love is the one that we are being called to, what is all so new about that?

It's Jesus. In another instance, Jesus defines the greatest commandment, in part, as loving your neighbor as yourself. Here, Jesus says love as Jesus has loved you. That brings a different standard. Love is often framed as an emotion or as actions that we undertake. While both hold truth, they are limited understandings of love when compared with the glorious love of Jesus.

We seek the glory of love because it is in that Glory that God is glorified. God is love. Jesus is the living, breathing walking talking embodiment of love because he is the embodiment of God. When Jesus invites us to love in the way he has loved—fully, forcefully, and completely—he is inviting us as disciples into the journey of bringing love to life for each other, and for the world as a whole. God is glorified not in our compassionate and affectionate feelings for one another, full of acts of charity and good will. It is a good start and all, but the love LIKE Jesus has a different character yet. It is the fullness of life, and the promise of hope. But neither is Jesus beckoning us to our own cross-like deaths, sacrificing all in the name of the good, taking on suffering for the sake of suffering. God is glorified when we live the Christ-life to the fullest, and in that life point to that which is far beyond us.

This is our invitation, always, but seldom do we take Jesus up on his parting commandment. Study after study reveals that the broad church is not known for its love nor Christians for their way of being. The church is known for its many arguments more than its working of grace, hope and love. Even within our own ranks we can fail the task of loving, allowing shallow connection to stand in for the love of Christ. The character of Christian love cares not just about the surface issues of “how are you” but reaches, repeatedly, into actually caring about the substance of the others life—the good and the bad. There is little room here for

the satisfaction of theological debate, the insistence on purity of thought and practice—only on the messy work of loving each other wholly, completely, and fully, as Jesus did.

No matter how close the bonds of a congregation may be, we can always declare this to be true: Jesus calls us to love one another, time and again. It is a call whose season is never absent because the work of loving beyond ourselves, our preferences, our desires is never easy and never done. We can always find new ways to incarnate the love of God in ourselves (loving our self as Jesus does—extending grace—is always something that I know I need to work on); or brothers and sisters close to hand and far away, and to the world that Jesus loves fully and without reservation.

Life that journeys with strangers and friends glorifies God. Life that empathizes with the suffering of others and commits to healing and restoration glorifies God. Life that challenges the systems that counter the way, reign, and will of the Creator glorifies God. Life that is defined and rooted in love glorifies God.

We, who are created in the image of God, all genders are created in that image, glorify God when we reflect that love through the fullness and wholeness of our lives.

In all that we are may God be glorified. Amen.