

John 13:31-35 (Fifth Sunday of Easter—Series C)
“Love One Another”
Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT
May 15, 2022

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text is the Gospel Reading recorded in John 13:

³¹Therefore, when [Judas] had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified and God has been glorified in Him. ³²If God has been glorified in Him, and God will glorify Him in Him, and immediately He will glorify Him. ³³Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, ‘Where I am going you cannot come,’ now I say also to you. ³⁴A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another just as I loved you in order that you also love one another. ³⁵By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

A new commandment. A *mandatum novum* for you Latin fans, from which the name, “Maundy Thursday” is taken. On this Fifth Sunday of Easter, our Gospel lesson takes us back into the Upper Room on Maundy Thursday, the night in which Jesus was betrayed. And the betrayer has already made up his mind. Judas Iscariot has left the Passover table. He has gone out into the night in preparation for Jesus’ betrayal into the hands of the chief priests, scribes, and teachers of the law. The betrayal and arrest of Jesus is now mere hours away. It’s right on the doorstep. If Judas’ mind has been made up, then so has the Lord’s mind. He will accomplish the Father’s will and accept suffering and death for the salvation of the whole world from sin, death, and hell.

But before His Passion, Jesus gives His disciples a new commandment: “Love one another just as I loved you in order that you also love one another.” The basis on which this commandment is set is Jesus’ own love for His disciples—as I loved you! So, we already know that the command to love one another doesn’t come from within ourselves. It’s not our idea, nor does it have its foundation on our ability or willingness to love one another. Because of

our fallen, sinful human nature, our so-called “love” is turned inward to ourselves. I’m most happy to love me, myself, and I. But when it comes to loving another—my wife, my kids, my friends, my enemies—ha! No way! My selfishness puts me first, not God and not others. When Jesus was asked which commandment is the most important of all, He answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And 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.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:28–31 ESV).

How then is it even possible for us to love one another? In and of ourselves, it is impossible. But not with God. The basis and foundation of our love toward others, indeed, the power and ability to love one another, flows from the love of Jesus Christ. St. John the Evangelist lays this before us in his first epistle, chapter 4: “In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, if God so loved us, then we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:10-11 NET). God loved us first so that the result of His love might be made known in the lives of His disciples.

Where do we most clearly see the Father’s love? In Jesus. Again, from 1 John 4, “By this the love of God is revealed *in us*: that God has sent his one and only Son into the world so that we may live through him” (1 John 4:9 NET). In order that we might carry out Jesus’ commandment to love one another *just as* He has loved us, Jesus first demonstrated that perfect love, that self-sacrificing love, a love that compelled Him to suffer death and hell *for you* on a cross.

The standard of love which Jesus' disciples, you and I, are to have for one another is the very love which our Lord has lavished on us. John 13 begins by telling us that Jesus, "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end"—to the uttermost; completely. And that complete love was revealed as Judas left the meal and Jesus stayed the course. He would be with His disciples only a little while. And where He was going, they could not come. That is, the disciples couldn't come to the cross and to grave. Only Jesus. Only the Son of Man, the Son of God, could suffer and die to pay for the sins of the world. Only Jesus, the Son of the Heavenly Father, could shed His holy, precious blood to atone for our sins while suffering the death of hell on the cross. In the suffering and death of Jesus, God the Father and God the Son are glorified.

But how can this be? Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified and God has been glorified in Him." No doubt, a part of the glory Jesus says His Father will give Him immediately includes events that are obviously not glorious—Jesus' humiliation at the hands of the soldiers, His suffering in body and soul under the wrath of God the Father, His bloody death. But despite their appearance, these events glorify God because they are the means by which the Triune God accomplishes His brilliant plan to provide salvation from sin, death, and hell for all people. And that plan is the love of God in His Son Jesus Christ brought to fulfillment on a cross. God loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

I'm becoming more and more convinced over the years that "love" really isn't as much of an emotion or feeling that we might think it is. Love—biblical love—is an action that God our Father first embodied and enacted for us in the person of His One-of-a-Kind Son, Jesus. If you want to know what love is, I can show you. Love is God the Father acting in Christ to

save you from sin, death, and hell. Love is receiving you as His dear child because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, even when you were at one time His enemy. Love is removing from you the guilt and consequence of eternal death and hell from you simply according to His grace and mercy in Jesus, without any merit or worthiness in you. Love is taking away the sting of death by promising resurrection to your body on the Last Day when, as we heard in the reading from Revelation 21, "[God] will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:3–4 ESV).

This is love. Only Jesus could die in your place to secure your forgiveness and everlasting life. Only Jesus could rise in your place, thereby assuring your resurrection on the Last Day. Because of Jesus' glorification in His suffering, death, and resurrection, we have the amazing love of God revealed to us. Much more, we have the love of God in Christ active within us by the power of the Holy Spirit. As we await the Last Day and the triumphant return of our Lord and Savior, we love one another just as Jesus first loved us.

Jesus' love for you and me is the energizing power for our love toward one another. By the power of the Holy Spirit working by means of Baptism, you have been purified from all sins by Jesus' blood. 1 Corinthians 6:11, "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." You and I are now "new creations" (2 Cor. 5:17). We now live as new people by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, people who love one another not in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:18 ESV).

The Christian life is a life of faith in Jesus as our only Lord and Savior, but it is a life lived in love. We're alive to God in Christ by the Spirit and alive people live! And alive people in Christ live the life of love. This Christian life of faith and love is lived out in our daily callings or vocations: father, mother, son, daughter, worker, employer, and so on. Martin Luther, in his 1520 treatise, "The Freedom of the Christian," wrote:

"Behold, from faith thus flow forth love and joy in the Lord, and from love a joyful, willing, and free mind that serves one's neighbor willingly and takes no account of gratitude or ingratitude, of praise or blame, of gain or loss. . . . He does not distinguish between friends and enemies or anticipate their thankfulness or unthankfulness, but he most freely and most willingly spends himself and all that he has, whether he wastes all on the thankless or whether he gains a reward. . . .

Therefore, if we recognize the great and precious things which are given us, . . . our hearts will be filled by the Holy Spirit with the love which makes us free, joyful, almighty workers and conquerors over all tribulations, servants of our neighbors, and yet lords of all. For those who do not recognize the gifts bestowed upon them through Christ, however, Christ has been born in vain; they go their way with their works and shall never come to taste or feel those things. Just as our neighbor is in need and lacks that in which we abound, so we were in need before God and lacked his mercy. Hence, as our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and its works, and each one should become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christs to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christians. . . . Surely we are named after Christ, not because he is absent from us, but

because he dwells in us, that is, because we believe in him and are Christs one to another and do to our neighbors as Christ does to us.”¹

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another just as I loved you in order that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Christ Jesus loved you with an everlasting love and gave Himself to the death of the cross to pay for your sins and rose again to assure you that you are forgiven and have eternal life in Body and Soul. By faith in Christ, you have HIS love. By the power of the Holy Spirit, you share HIS love. Amen.

¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 367–368.