

May 15, 2022 Easter 5C
The Choice of Love
John 13:31-35

John 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

"As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Perhaps more than any other single verse in the New Testament, this one should cause us to rise up from the pew, run out the church doors, and never come back. But I want to celebrate it today.

Just before he died and just after he washed feet, Jesus shared this command with His disciples: "Love one another."

Now on one level, that's no sweat. Think nice thoughts, do an occasional good deed, and center your life around the things you read on Hallmark cards. Love. We know how to do that because we are generally pretty nice people, right?

But wait a minute. Jesus doesn't stop there. He also says, "Just as I have loved you." Now that's the part I often run from. And I wouldn't blame you if that's what you decide to do. I'm okay in the love department and think it's a pretty good idea. But Jesus doesn't say to love just any old way. But rather His way. Just like He did. Just like a cross. You can die loving His way. Loving His way is not safe. But that's his advice. Check that. Actually it's a non-negotiable command for those who choose to follow.

Golden Rule vs. New command.

Golden Rule: So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Matthew 7:12

Self-driven: how we want to be treated is the motivation for how we treat others.

New Command: As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

Christ-Driven: motivation is how Jesus loves us, not how we want others to treat us.

Challenges to love:

- 1) Other people are weird
- 2) We're selfish

New command takes care of both. We don't love based upon who other people are (weird) or who we are (selfish), but upon who Jesus is.

Jim Wallis of the "Sojourners" community in Washington, D.C., once wrote that the American church has a huge credibility problem. "Our Scriptures, confessions, and creeds are all very public, out in the open. Anyone can easily learn what it is supposed to mean to be a Christian. Our Bible is open to public examination; so is the church's life. That is our problem. People can read what our Scriptures say, and they can see how Christians live. The gulf between the two has created an enormous credibility gap."¹

Jesus goes on to say today, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples." Exactly how will others know this about us? By our ability to articulate the Apostles' Creed from memory? From the way we're able to reel off the 66 books of the Bible in order? Nope. Jesus suggests that others will detect our discipleship to the extent that we love as he loved. We sometimes miss how huge of a claim this teaching of Jesus really is. And what exactly is at stake when we do see it.

Immersed in a culture that has largely given up God, the credibility of the American church is contingent upon the church's ability to produce disciples who love as Jesus loved. Jesus says that the only way others will know you're a disciple is through the extent his love has a place in all you do and say. "By this," he says, "others will know." This entails more than getting the liturgy right each week or listening to a preacher hand down helpful spiritual advice.

Look at how this text unfolds:

- Jesus begins by saying that he displays the Father's glory.
- He is going away. So He will no longer be displaying the Father's glory. Something new is needed.
- New Command: Love one another.
- The Father's glory is now displayed through us—"by this all people will know..."

It means taking Jesus' love public. It means living Jesus' way in a culture that wants to kill him again. It means loving not when we feel like it or on our own terms, but as he did, in all things. The life of a disciple will begin to look like, well, a cross. "Love one another," he says. But in a certain, prescribed way. "Just as I've loved you." If that little word "as" does not put the fear of the Lord in you, then you need to go back to Bible 101 and look closely at exactly how this man loved. Even upon the one thousandth reading it's hard to believe he says some of the stuff he does.

The teachings of Jesus are not so hard to stomach in the abstract. It's when we try to apply them to the concrete stuff of life that problems arise.

Example of foot washing and Scandal of new Pope washing Muslim woman's feet.

Example Jesus' words from cross—"Father forgive them..."

You may say, "Well, such a life just isn't practical." And I say touché. There's not a blessed thing practical about being a disciple of Jesus. Who told you that? If you want to get practical, then join Kiwanis.

It is decidedly impractical to love as Jesus loves. It's amazing to me that we church people aren't mad at Jesus more than we are. For his teachings challenge much of what we hold so dear. If you read the Bible closely, prepare to be bothered. Maybe that's why modern Christians have largely given up Bible reading as a daily discipline. What Jesus teaches compared to how we live is often too much to bear. "Love one another," says the man. "Just as I have loved you." Do I really love that way? Or want to?

And that's a dilemma for us, isn't it? Realistically, how do we love as Jesus loved? Do we simply decide one Sunday morning that from now on, by golly, I'm going to try my darndest to love this way? Is it a matter of willpower? Or do we perhaps try to scold people into loving as Jesus did? Tell them things like, "Well, you ought to love like Jesus loved after all he's done for you, you ungrateful wretch." One of the things I find somewhat simplistic about the "What Would Jesus Do?" movement is that presumably one is to discover WWJD and then just do that very thing. I recall those Michael Jordan commercials where young adolescents were invited to "Just Do It" -- just get in there and be Michael, you can do it, forgetting the years of practice and toil it took to become such a basketball player. It's like telling a young person to sit down at a piano keyboard and play Chopin before he or she has taken the time to learn the scales.

I'm unconvinced that individual willpower or authoritarian scolding will teach children or adults very much about loving as Jesus loved. These, by the way, are the historic routes taken by the liberal and fundamentalist wings of the church from last century. A) Pretty much leave people alone and let them find their own way, basically making up the morality they need as they go along; or B) "Guilt" people into change by telling them how worthless they are. Such tactics will usually create either very puny or very resentful disciples.

So again the question: How do we teach people to love as Jesus loved? The love of Jesus is too strange, too much at odds with popular culture, too

divinely whacky for a person just to up and decide one fine day to live this way.

One unusual feature of the Gospel of John is that there is no Passover meal. In every other Gospel, Jesus makes precise preparations for such a meal. And then during the meal Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper. "This is my body. This is my blood." But in John the details are very different. In this Gospel, Jesus eats a meal with the disciples, but it isn't the Passover. In John they gather well before Passover occurs. And Jesus really never institutes Holy Communion here. Look high and low and you'll never find him saying, "This is my body" while holding up some bread. In John chapter 13, Jesus stoops to wash the feet of his friends, and then begins a long, unbroken four-chapter speech: a kind of last will and testament for those who will carry on his ministry. It is not until chapter 19 that the Passover is finally mentioned by John, the same day that Jesus is crucified at high noon. Lambs were traditionally slaughtered at this hour in preparation for the Passover meal.

John may be different, but he's not subtle. In his Gospel, Jesus does not eat the Passover with his followers. Instead, he is the Passover. He becomes the Passover Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. We sing of this promise each and every time we share the Lord's Supper. Lamb of God you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us. We wipe his blood on the doorposts of our lives and we are freed from death. Passed over. Jesus doesn't eat the Passover in John. He is the Passover. He's the main meal. Like in no other Gospel, John forcefully suggests that we are saved as Jesus dramatically dishes up his body for the salvation of the world. Jesus' life is sacrificed for the nourishment of all humanity. For God so loved the planet. Jesus offers himself for our well-being, not to appease some demanding God who wants blood payment for our sin, but rather to show us truly how to live. For others. "As I have loved you."

At the heart of our attempts to love as Jesus loved is this meal where Jesus has offered his very life. If indeed "you are what you eat," perhaps our Lord's Supper celebrations should come with warning labels. Over time, dining with Jesus will transform us more and more into his likeness.

"Love one another," he said.

Just like that.

1. Jim Wallis, *The Call To Conversion: Recovering the Gospel for These Times* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), pp. 18-19.