

Easter 5

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John 13:31-35 – ***Our Glorious Savior Empowers Us to Love***
St. Matthew's

Oconomowoc

Dear Friends in Christ,

I want you to listen again to the last part of our reading, because Jesus gives us a command there that is very troubling to me. He says, ***“Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”*** When I look at the selfless love of Jesus and compare it to myself, I fall far short of this directive. Just think about all the opportunities we have to show love. Someone is stranded on the side of the road with car trouble but we have an appointment to keep so we fail to show love. Our children come asking for help with their homework but we are too tired, or too consumed with the television to give them the help they need and we fail to show love. The materials we ordered for our home renovation project didn't arrive at the scheduled time, and in a voice of annoyance, we bite off the head of the poor person whose job it is to give us the bad news, and we fail to show love.

But Jesus says, ***“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*** When I read that -- not only am I confronted with the fact that I have failed to follow Jesus' command to love, but I'm also forced to consider how my actions have reflected on my Savior since I call myself his disciple. All of a sudden, that nice little thought that Jesus shoots at his disciples becomes a weight on my shoulders, a burden I cannot bear, and public evidence of my incompetence as a Christian. But don't despair, Christian. In today's sermon text God assures us:

Our Glorified Savior Empowers Us To Love

I.

He does that, first of all, by giving the glory that we could not give. These words of our text were spoken by Jesus on Maundy Thursday in the upper room. The disciples were with him, with the exception of Judas. Judas had already left to lay the groundwork for Jesus' betrayal later that evening. Jesus' words might sound

bit strange when we remember that as our omniscient Lord Jesus knew everything that would unfold that evening and in the next couple of days. He knew the reason Judas left was to betray him. He knew that He would be arrested and tried and executed, and yet he says, ***“Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him.”*** What Jesus was saying, was that with all of the awful events about to unfold, God's gracious plan of salvation would come to its climax. Even though it was a plan that involved Jesus' suffering and death, he wanted to assure his disciples that it was a plan that would glorify him and at the same time bring glory to his Father.

But doesn't it surprise you that the Son of Man needed to be glorified? After all, he was fully God. All the glory that belonged to the Father rightly belonged to him. But, as you know, Jesus willingly set aside that glory to redeem a people who had given God disgrace instead of glory.

When God created our first parents, he created them to glorify him. They were to glorify him by living their lives in faithful trust, offering whole-hearted praise to God, and obeying him in perfect obedience. But when they listened to Satan, they doubted, rebelled and hid from God.

Those examples of our own failures to love that we mentioned earlier demonstrate that we too are part of the sinfully corrupt, dysfunctional family that Adam and Eve produced. Like Adam and Eve we too are totally unable to give God the glory he deserves and demands. But our text today reminds us that that's why Jesus came. He came to give God the glory that we could not give.

Think about the life of Jesus. He was perfectly obedient to his parents, always about his Father's business, thinking more about the needs of his disciples than about his own. Every single action of Jesus brought glory to God. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews says, ***“We have one who was tempted in every way just as we are yet was without sin.”*** Jesus gave the Father the glory he wanted to see from us. And since Jesus is our substitute, it's as if we were glorifying the Father ourselves, showing him the very glory for which God created us

II.

But this is really only half of the story. Not only does God demand perfect glory, he also demands payment for our failures. Thank God you have a glorified Savior who goes where we could not go. Psalm 49:7-8 reminds us, **“No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him— the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough.”** Our failures to love damn us. And we are so thoroughly corrupt that none of us could ever pay for our own failures, much less anyone else’s. But Jesus said, **“My children, I will 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 can not come.”** Even though Jesus had offered God the perfect obedience and the glory on our behalf, he still needed to endure the punishment for our failures, to restore our relationship with the Father again. There was only one way to accomplish that, and Jesus had to do it alone.

When Judas left the upper room, he set God’s plan into motion. It was a plan that led to a cross outside of Jerusalem on which Jesus would carry our load of guilt. Having offered God glory on our behalf, he then offered God perfect blood as the ransom price for our souls and payment for our sin. As Jesus was forsaken by the Father, he was insuring that you and I would never be forsaken, but would instead be the dearly loved children of God. When Jesus bowed his head in death, he removed the sting of death for us. And when Jesus rose from the dead, He conquered death once and for all, removing forever its curse and its fear.

Why would Jesus endure so much to restore our relationship with God. One simple word gives us the unbelievable answer. LOVE! Jesus loved us completely, loved us selflessly, and loved us unconditionally. Jesus loved us in a way we could not love. Look at how we love. We love our spouses because of the way they make us feel about ourselves. We love our partners because of the things they do for us. But if that isn’t happening, it becomes very difficult for us to love. With our children it’s a different. We know going in that little babies aren’t able to give much back to us. They are takers for the most part. Somebody said that’s why God makes little babies, and little puppies and little kitties so cute. We

know they’re takers, but how can we help loving them because they’re so cute and cuddly. But let them get older and they disappoint us if they still aren’t giving love back? We feel let down if we don’t get a “thank you,” or at least see them applying the lessons that we taught them when they were young.

Do you see what I mean? Our love always comes with strings attached. But Jesus loved in a way we could not love. He loved the unlovable. He loved us completely. He gave us everything he had -- his righteousness, his perfect blood, and even his life, in order to restore us. Jesus loved us unconditionally, never once threatening to withdraw his love when we failed to live up to his expectations.

It’s that love that enables us and empowers us to be loving toward one another. Jesus says, **“A new command I give you. Love one another.”** In reality that command had been around since the beginning of time. But it was new in the sense that Jesus love was about to be put on display for the disciples to see. And that love would become the force that motivated those disciples to be loving people. It was a totally new concept for the disciples. Their Jewish religious leaders were consumed and obsessed with the question, “How much should I love my neighbor?” But Jesus taught them to ask a new question: “How much has God loved me?”

That is the question we to ask ourselves too. Ask yourself that question when your child asks for help with the homework, and you’ve had a long day at work and you want some personal time to relax. Ask yourself that question when you see someone stranded on the side of the road and you have no time to offer assistance. Ask it when someone fails to meet your expectations. Ask it when your congregation asks you to serve on council or on a committee. Ask it when you’re planning your offerings for your church and your synod. Every time you ask that question you’re going to come up with the same answer. God has loved me far more than I have deserved. He’s loved me far more than I could ever love him or anyone else. And He’s loved me far more than I could ever repay. May the Holy Spirit move us by that love to put away the selfishness of our sinful nature. And may we be em-

powered by the love of God to take on the attitude of Savior. May
Jesus by his love empower us to love. Amen.