

Sermon Easter 5 2019

May 19, 2019

John 13:31-35

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read.

As we hear the words of our Lord in this lesson, hopefully you can see why we have it in this season. As we are looking ahead to Jesus' ascension, we are looking at that time when He would leave from the presence of His disciples that they had known since His resurrection. In other words, they wouldn't see Him. **"Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.'"** Now in this passage, Jesus is actually referring to the fact that they can't follow Him to His atoning sacrifice on the cross. But hopefully you can see the connection to the ascension. When He ascended from their sight, they saw Him no more. They also knew that they weren't going to be able to just jump up and ascend with him. What were they to do? Well, they were to await His return. And as is fitting for that, He left them with the thought we have here. In other words, as we hear His words, they are given for us awaiting His return just as much as they were given for those eleven hearing Him speak that night before His death. And what does He say?

Love: **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."**

Here is the command: love. Of course, He calls this a new command, but that command to love isn't new at all, is it? You know we often think about Jesus responding to the question about the greatest commandment: "teacher what is the greatest commandment?" To which Jesus responds, "The greatest commandment is this 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength,' and the second is like it, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" We hear Jesus say that, we reference it all the time, but do you know where those verses come from? Did you know those are actually from the Old Testament, and the commandment to love in this way is not new?

So love that way, love as this command is expressed in the Ten Commandments. I haven't reminded you in a while, but make sure you know them. Know the commandments so that you may order your life according to them. Know them so that

you would know how to love God by not having other Gods, not taking His Name in Vain, and by remembering the Sabbath Day by keeping it Holy. Know them so that you would know how to love your neighbor by honoring authority, not murdering but helping in every physical need, by living a sexually pure and decent life in what you do and SAY, by not stealing, not bearing false witness, and not coveting. Love in this way.

In fact, as I was reading about this something made the point that the Greek word used here for love, “*agape*”—something you’ve maybe heard before—that word is inclined to a love that isn’t merely emotionally, it’s not something based on passions, but knowledge and duty. In other words, you don’t have feel an outpouring of unblemished affection for someone, but you still have to do what our Lord calls you to do.

As I say that, though I want you to reflect on something. As I tell you to love, what’s the attitude of your heart in that? How do you hear it? Do you say, “OK Pastor, I know I’m supposed to love.” Or do you think, “I can’t do it!” Or do you think of this as such a burden? Do you feel burdened in hearing what God wants you to do, or you do you delight in it.

If you’re like me it’s probably mixed, right? But I was thinking about this because as I was reading about the call, the command to love, I was reminded of I John 4 where John says, “**For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.**” This command is not burdensome, it’s not a weight on you. But is that how you think of it? Do you think about the commandments with the view that they’re a delight, or a burden?

You know I think about what we did last week with the Bed’s Plus dinner. That was a joy, wasn’t it? Isn’t it a joy and a delight to give to those in need like that? It’s a delight to gather in that setting and work together for helping our neighbor. But what about the panhandler on the street? Do you give to them based on that delight? Or do you give out of guilt? Or do you not give and feel guilty there. Or what about other commands? Do you delight to love your neighbor? Do you think about how God calls you to love those who have hurt you and think about that responsibility with joy? “Wow, I’m so glad that Sally offended me the other day so that now I have the opportunity to love and forgive her!” Do you think like that? But that’s love.

Luther said this, “*To love does not mean... to wish someone else well, but to bear someone else’s burdens, that is, to bear what is burdensome to you and what you would rather not bear. Therefore a Christian must have broad shoulders and husky bones to*

carry the flesh, that is, the weakness, of the brethren; for Paul says that they have burdens and troubles. Love is sweet, kind, and patient—not in receiving but in performing; for it is obliged to overlook many things and to bear with them... if we are able to bear and overlook our own faults and sins, which we commit in such great numbers every day, let us bear those of others as well...” Christians, that’s what’s commanded of you.

Of course, as I have been saying all of this, I still haven’t addressed something. I haven’t addressed what’s new about this. I made the point this is an old command, but Jesus said He was giving a new commandment. So what’s new? To do this as He has loved us.

And that’s the heart of this. The reality is that now this love is grounded in the love of Christ. In fact, Luther took this very seriously. He said in one place, *“But,” says Christ, “I am only commanding you to prove your faith by serving and helping your neighbor, by promoting his welfare, by showing him fidelity and love. If you do this, you have done all I ask of you; and now you are like Me. But if you neglect this or do the opposite, you dare not boast of Me. Then your own deeds bear witness against you and prove that you are not true and fruitful branches in Me, but decayed wood that has been severed from Me.”* Or elsewhere He says, *“where works and love do not break forth, there faith is not right, the gospel does not yet take hold, and Christ is not rightly known.”*

Why do I say this? To make the point that even the greatest advocate of salvation by Grace through faith alone hears these words and knows that this love is so important. But hear the acknowledgement in it. It’s grounded in the knowledge of what Christ is done.

You see, you are utterly unable to do this of yourselves. You are unable to love like this of yourself. You are greedy and don’t want to give of yourself. If you do want to give of yourself it’s in service to a God who is not the Triune God, to a god who is your own satisfaction and self-righteousness, or the approval of men, or something else. And you don’t want to bless those who hurt you of yourself. Instead you want to cling to their guilt and harm against you. But that’s where this newness of Christ comes in.

It’s the newness of what John says in His letter, *“we love because He first loved us.”* We love because His the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for you. The beginning of this passage has Jesus speaking of God glorifying Himself in Jesus. That’s

this love. That's the love with which He loves you. That's the love of the blood of God shed to redeem His Church. In fact, I was visiting a shut-in this week who said it so well. I was talking about how we often think of God's glory in relation to majesty and light, and yet when John speaks of this glory it's not that naked light or goodness, or majesty. No it's the cross. The shut in said, "that's the peak of His glory."

Yes, the cross is the peak of His glory, "**Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.**" There is the peak of that love. I think you've heard me say this before, but it's on that cross that we see God's love most abundantly. We see it in the height of its glory and purity. After all, what is the purist form of love? Is love purist when a person loves those who love them back? Is our love purist when we love those who give us love in return? No, the purist love is that love which loves with no expectation of recompense. When God loved us while we were yet His enemies, when Christ on the cross hanged for the guilt of those who by all accounts should be unlovable, when God has loved you in your sin which makes you unlovable, there is love at the height of glory.

Christians, as you are called by Jesus in this new command, love as He tells you to. Love knowing that if you don't you can't see the Gospel as taking root in you. But love knowing that God has loved you in your sin. That's the newness of it: His love for you. His love baptizing you into Christ. His love feeding you with that body and blood. His love spoken over you. His love that will wipe away your every tear. As we prepare to hear of our Lord's ascension, know that love, and know that you live in it by His Grace and His Grace alone. Amen.