

John 13:31-35

When Judas had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 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. I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 13:31-35, 2016

I was struck by a few seemingly small things in our lesson for today; words really

Now, glorified, and love

We need first to take a look at the context of this story to get to what it holds for us today.

The immediate context is the upper room as Jesus shares a final meal with his disciples.

Jesus has washed feet, discerned Judas' betrayal and identified him as the one by giving him a piece of bread,

and Judas has gone off to do what he has to do.

The greater context also is that Jesus has reached the end of his ministry in this world,

and is about to go fulfill His purpose for shedding the glory of His position with the Father as the Son of God, and taking on our humiliation, suffering, humanity,

coming into this world, and now about to undergo the beatings, the shame, the derision and bitterness of his death for our sake.

It is in that context that Jesus says,

“Now the Son of Man has been glorified...”

Now? Glorified?

How can all that has happened, the betrayal that is in progress right now and what is to come serve to glorify the Son of Man—Jesus, or God?

Either I don't understand the meaning of the word glory or Jesus is doing something different here, again.

Go to the dictionary and look up the word glory, or glorify and you find,

renowned, fame, honor, adoring praise and thanksgiving, to exalt, to transform into something more splendid.

These do not sound like the words that would characterize what Jesus has experienced, or His position in the world.

So, what is going on here?

I would suggest that there may be two perspectives that are incongruent at play here,

the first being ours which fits the definition we find in the dictionary, and the other a heavenly, Godly perspective.

This second perspective is the perspective that Jesus is referring to when He says,

“Now the Son of man is glorified.”

If we go back a few verses into chapter 12 we find this saying, better yet, this parable as Jesus responds to a request by some Greeks to see Jesus.

He says,

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

Jesus speaks of his own dying and being buried through which He will be glorified.

How can we ever grasp that?

We easily see the glory in Jesus’ resurrection, in His ascension, but what glory can we perceive in His crucifixion?

According to Jesus’ understanding there is a powerful irony around the notion of glory, because it is in the cross that Jesus and God are glorified.

Additionally, the disappearance of Judas into the night to plot and prepare Jesus’ betrayal,

and the anticipation of Peter’s denial of Jesus become a part of the Jesus’ glorification because they too are a part of the irony.

As it turns out death and betrayal are at the core of Jesus’ glory.

And so, Jesus begins His final preparations for leaving the disciples on this note.

And as He does He leaves them this one command.

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

You may think that, okay we couldn't quite get the glory thing and so it is good to have something we can really wrap our heads and hearts around,

After all, everyone gets the concept of love.

But, again, Jesus is about to give a little more detail about the love He speaks of.

If you go to Chapter 15:13 you discover Jesus' words spoken to the disciples on this same night;

“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.”

No irony, just a simple command to give your most precious thing for another, your life.

Here we go again, back to the cross.

Jesus takes us back to the cross where He lay down His life for you. That is how He loved you.

This is how you are called to love one another.

Having Jesus as a model of love breaks down all the limits of love,

a love that does not count the cost.

This command is simple isn't it?

It is simple enough for a child to memorize,
and profound enough that most mature believers are
repeatedly embarrassed at how poorly they
comprehend it and put it into practice.

Love is central to what we are to be about.

Jesus said, “By this everyone will know that you are my
disciples, if you have love for one another.”

I think He really wanted to make it easy for us to be his disciples
by having us focus on one thing, love.

Yet we have found so many other ways to identify true believers
and often have a hard time putting this commandment into
practice.

That is the way it has been throughout the history of the
Christian Church.

It took hundreds of years to figure out what ought to be in
the bible, what the Nicene Creed ought to say, and these
decisions came only through the combative struggle among
theologians.

We still spend time figuring out vision and mission statements
that would give us greater, at least self identity.

Then if somehow the focus is on love, we fight about how
it is we will go about sharing God’s love among ourselves
and in the community,

sometimes to the detriment of the ministry itself
because in the process we haven't loved one another.

Love one another, a commandment so easy, and yet so difficult.

Since becoming a pastor I have always held the opinion that we love people into the church, we don't indoctrinate them in.

This means that you love the visitor and the guest.

This means that the visitor and guest get to experience your love for one another while they are here,

and that love is your witness to the love God has for you, and gives you to share with the other,

with the visitor or guest who comes whatever day of the week or time of day.

What Jesus wanted us to know was that although people would fight wars over who held the correct beliefs and many other things inside and outside the church,

by theologians and intelligent preachers, and many others,

this was not His primary concern.

His primary concern today is less about what you believe, and more about how you live.

Jesus takes on the character of one who loves tenderly when He says to the disciples, and to you today,

“Little children, I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. By this everyone will know you are my disciples.”

In doing this you bring glory to Jesus.

Amen