

The Fifth Sunday of Easter

April 24, 2016

Prayer of the Day: O God, you form the minds of your faithful people into a single will. Make us love what you command and desire what you promise, that among the many changes of this world, our hearts may ever yearn for the lasting joys of heaven; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! I am the way, the truth, and the life, says the Lord. Alleluia! (John 14:6)

Sermon Text: John 13:31-35

John 13:31-35

³¹ When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

³³ "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 cannot come.

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

Our sermon reading comes from John 13:31-35.

When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

"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 cannot come.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Have you ever watched one of those crime shows where the detectives just cannot solve a mystery? Investigators find the victim, but cannot determine how they were harmed. They interview dozens of suspects, but each suspect has an alibi. They piece together a story, but it remains nothing better than a guess.

You watch these detectives grow frustrated when they just cannot crack the case. Then suddenly you hear it: "We've been looking at it all wrong!" Maybe they did not consider a certain person a suspect or failed to consider other factors surrounding the crime scene. Instead of focusing on what they think happened, they restudy their evidence from a different angle.

Can that phrase describe a moment in your life? Maybe you were absolutely worried about retirement. You saw the money in your savings account and had no idea how you have enough to retire on. Then, you stopped looking at your green dollars and realized

your house, car, and smaller possessions are things you do not have to buy for retirement; you already have purchased them. Maybe a math problem stumped you. No matter how long you stared at the “equal”-sign, you just could not figure out the answer. Then you realized that you needed to trace your math back to the beginning, correct a step you did wrong, and then you reached the right answer. You were looking at it all wrong!

So when you hear Jesus’ command this morning: “Love one another!” it might sound like an uncrackable mystery or a daunting view of retirement or the unsolvable math problem. How can you possibly keep a command like that?

Do not look at the command from the wrong angle. Take a step back from the plain words and understand what it is Jesus really instructs you to do. Because to **“LOVE ONE ANOTHER!”**— **CAN YOU DO IT?** *No, not by your own willpower. Yes, because Jesus is your motivation.*

That is the point Jesus makes. The command to “Love one another” is not a new command at all; it has already been in place for centuries. In the Old Testament book of Leviticus, God commands: *“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself...”* ([Leviticus 19:18](#)). God has always desired that you love your fellowman as much as you love and care for yourself ([Matthew 22:39](#)). That their needs are considered as important as your needs; their emotions as your emotions; their words as your words. So, Jesus reminds you of the importance of this timeless command.

Yet, to **“LOVE ONE ANOTHER!”**— **CAN YOU DO IT?** Is it that easy to obey? I mean, do you always listen to the needs of your spouse? That you treat their concerns and anxieties, their hopes and dreams as important as yours? Or do you sometimes block out the words simply because you do not think it is that important to listen to? Or do you already your mind made up and will no longer consider any other input? Have you always loved your fellow believers as much as you love your thoughts and desires? That you understand why the person sitting next to you might be a little disruptive? Or that you still remain patient even when they are disagreeable? Or do you simply feel so inconvenienced by any noise that you immediately show your frustration? Or does disagreement move beyond discussion and just simply into argument—where you do not budge at all?

Is that not really the difficulty behind the command? That I can lose focus on the entire reason to **“LOVE ONE ANOTHER”**? How often, when it comes to interacting with our fellow believers, that we may not so much struggle to demonstrate selfless love to others, as much as we just intentionally not want to care for others? If we look at this command from the wrong angle— and we are looking inside of ourselves to find a reason to love others, then we will never ever be able to **“LOVE ONE ANOTHER.”** You can never meet this demand *by your own willpower* because Jesus never intended you to obey it by your own self-willpower.

Consider the reason why he even gives this command at all. These verses take you to Maundy Thursday evening— about 18 hours before Jesus’ crucifixion. Jesus knew that in a

few hours a crowd would arrest him; they would quickly rush him through courtrooms. His body would be whipped and punched, bloody and bruised. More than that, people would stand in front of him and unleash rants of just how much they hate him. They will accuse him of evil, ignore his defense, and lie to secure a death sentence. Even though he knows all this will happen, he still does not try to escape. Instead, the minute Judas slipped out the door to put his betrayal into motion, **Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him.”** That means Jesus’ saving work will demonstrate just how much he loves you.

You do see that selfless love. On Good Friday, Jesus dies even though he does not have to. He is perfect, but he chooses to carry your sins to death. Every time the whip cracks, every insult and fist-smack he feels, he is doing this for you. Even his Father in heaven treats Jesus as though Jesus demonstrated no care for the world. That he ignored those with diseases. That he did not care about those crushed by guilt. That he turned his back on those who hungered for his saving Word. God treats him as a sinner, One who rebelled against him.

Yet, love for you compels Jesus to act. He does not wish that you suffer any of this ([1 Timothy 2:3-4](#)). So, Jesus suffers a punishment you will never fully know. We can describe what he suffers on the cross as best as we can, but because Jesus dies in our place, we will never taste eternal death. Instead, because Jesus suffers, dies, and rises again, we glorify him with our shouts of praise.

This is the entire reason Jesus can even imagine giving the command to **LOVE ONE ANOTHER!** He stands right beside his words; he points you to his saving work and uses this as the motivating why you can follow his command. The more you look at what Jesus did to save you, the more you are able to reflect that selfless love to those around you. So, **“LOVE ONE ANOTHER!” — CAN YOU DO IT? *Yes, because Jesus is your motivation.***

So, he can say to: **“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”** He uses a special word for “love.” It describes loving someone unlovable— like patiently caring for your child who will not stop crying in the middle of the night or looking out for the needs of some loud-mouthed bully. You love even when someone has done nothing to deserve your love. You are willing to demonstrate that love because you and I did nothing that Jesus was forced to come and save us. The selfless love of Jesus motivates you to reflect that love to others.

So, you to look at the person to the right and to the left of you. You to look at someone who is older than you and younger than you. You to see little children, who may sometimes fuss, and consider what their true needs are. You not only care about them right here, right now, but you continue demonstrating this unconditional love at all times.

Sometimes that means you may put aside your personal demands for the sake of someone else’s needs. You may have ideas of how we want our church building to look and function. Sometimes you may fret over spending money for maintenance items. There are times God has not laid out a “right” and “wrong” decision; so, you do take into consideration the needs of others. You consider updates that might help people come into our church building. You hear information presented on maintenance repair. Even though

you may not spend money a certain way in your house, you consider the needs of your fellow believers and the needs your church building can offer visitors. You listen, you calmly respond—and most of all, you act in ways which best serve the needs of others.

Sometimes you may not particularly care for certain personalities. You may squirm at disruptions. You may grow irritated that someone forced you out of your traditional comfort zone. Yet, what greater love can you demonstrate than that of Christ's sacrificial love? The Son of God gave up his life so that you can spend eternal life with him! What a wonderful opportunity to give up some earthly tradition so that others might gain something eternal! That may come by bearing with short distractions or sitting in a new comfort zone.

We are a group of believers, united in faith grounded in every teaching of the Bible. There is no "us-versus-them" mentality. So, you work together as this body of believers. You already do that. You join together to worship your God and by coming, you encourage one another not to give up meeting together ([Hebrews 10:25](#)). You listen to the needs of others and bring those issues/concerns to the church council or to the Pastor. You give generous offerings to support our ministry of sharing God's Word among yourselves and with others in the city (and around the world). You write cards to the sick and visit those who are sick. You mourn with those who are sad and you comfort the brokenhearted. Yes, plainly speaking, it takes time out of your day to tend to the needs of others. Sometimes you change your schedule around so that you might make someone happier. At times you concede your good idea because someone else has a need you must meet. Many times you do not even recognize how you already live in this love— because it comes naturally. Jesus' command to "**LOVE ONE ANOTHER!**" flows through you *because Jesus is your motivation.*

So when you hear Jesus' command this morning: "Love one another!" it might sound like an uncrackable mystery or a daunting view of retirement or the unsolvable math problem. How can you possibly keep a command like that?

Do not look at the command from the wrong angle. Take a step back from the plain words and understand what it is Jesus really instructs you to do. Only as you continue gathering around the foot of the cross, Jesus' selfless, merciful love will continually touch you. Only as you draw from this source, you are able to selflessly love others. Because to "**LOVE ONE ANOTHER!**" — **CAN YOU DO IT?** *No, not by your own willpower. Yes, because Jesus is your motivation.*