

## **Fifth Sunday in Easter**

May 19, 2019

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Farmington, New Mexico

**John 13:31-35** When he was gone, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is 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 everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

### **“New Love from a New Heart”**

At graduation time, there are always a few key elements. There is the emotional parent. She can't stop crying no matter how hard she tries. She misses key moments in the graduation ceremony while she keeps searching for tissues and can't stop hugging her new graduate. There is the student who has been goofing off his entire academic career. He can't stop being with pride and a little bit of surprise that he's actually made it. There is the serious scholar. She can't wait to get on to the next level and continue her education, and leave this childish level behind.

There's also the inevitable graduation address. The speaker take a few different approaches. There is the heartfelt approach that seizes on the accomplishments of the graduates and encourages them to keep things in perspective. There's the inspirational speech. The speaker tries to motivate the graduates to take what they've learned and go out and change the world. They will experience setbacks. They will fail. They just have to get back up and keep trying. Then there is the humorous approach. The speaker tries to lighten the mood and help the graduates laugh at themselves, setting the example by not taking himself too seriously.

In John chapter 13, Jesus realizes his disciples have finished “school” with him. Soon he will be going away from them and turning them loose on their own. He wants them to take what they have learned and use it. Just like the best graduation speeches are worth reading or watching the video even if you aren't one of the graduates, Jesus gives us some parting words of wisdom to live by. Jesus wants us to come to grips with the natural, inescapable realities of the disordered love in our hearts. He wants us to understand the ways our hearts influence the way we see the world and impact every one of our relationships. Jesus, more than anything, wants us to experience his radical love. Appreciating his humility that puts the needs of others first will free us from our selfish love. We will be freed to see other people from the loving perspective of Jesus and carry out our calling to love others with the self-sacrificing love of Jesus. Jesus gives us a new love that comes from a new heart.

John 13:1 tells us this takes place “just before the Passover Festival.” It's just hours before Judas betrays Jesus. Just hours before his incarceration and interrogation, his torture and

execution. But before all that happens, Jesus needs to share this final Passover Meal with his disciples. And that's when we learn Jesus **"got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist."** (John 13:4) Then Jesus proceeds to wash the disciples feet. What we don't read is what the disciples were all doing before Jesus washes their feet. See, the job of foot washing, as you can imagine wasn't a pleasant one in a culture where people walked everywhere in open toed footwear over rocky and dusty terrain. So that job usually fell to a slave or servant. If no servant was present, it would belong to the lowest ranking person in the room.

So why is Jesus washing the feet of all those disciples? It's because every single one of them is standing around looking at the others. Andrew isn't sure of his draft position, but knows he isn't at the bottom. Philip is tired of serving while the others stand around and watch; it's someone else's turn now. Bartholomew is tired of being overlooked and is finally going to stand up for himself. Thomas is a little skeptical and wants to see an official ranking voted on and approved by all 12 disciples before he believes he should take the role of a servant. Matthew has been bankrolling the operation out of the riches of his former way of life; so now it's time for someone else to use their gifts. Simon the Zealot is a man of action, ready to take risks and face enemy forces, but not get down on the ground. James is waiting for someone to take the first step then he can follow along. John still remembers the argument about the greatest disciple and isn't going to back down or show humility before someone else caves in.

It's so simple that it's easy to overlook. Each disciple is looking at this episode from his own eyes. And how can they not? They see the degrading task, they see Jesus, they see each other from the perspective of how this would affect them. The longer they wait, the more they think about themselves. One Christian author compared the culture's impact on Christians to fish swimming in water. (Hunt, p. 24) We are being influenced in ways we don't even realize to put ourselves first. We don't even recognize our default way of interpreting the words and actions of other people. We have ingrained inside ourselves a way of understanding the world through how everything affects me, how I feel about the person next to me, what I think about whatever happens.

And the problem is more basic than the culture around us, accepting this inward focus to life like the air we breathe. Jesus gives a new command to love each other because of the tired old attitudes deep inside the heart of every disciple. The disciples at the beginning of John chapter 13 have a choice. Will they act in pride and wait for someone else to wash everyone's feet? Or will they humbly serve? And even in serving others, will they turn that act into a source for feeling superior to everyone else?

What our hearts tell us and what our culture reinforces in us is the belief that love is all about what you feel. Love is what you feel when someone makes you feel happy or special or important. Love is your reaction when someone does what you want them to do or when things go your way. Love is that warm, intoxicating feeling that spreads from the core of your being to the outermost extremities because someone has done or said something loving to you.

1 Corinthians 13 shows us love isn't primarily about feelings, but a commitment to act in the best interests of other people: **"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."** (1 Corinthians 13:4-8) But the more I think about this kind of love, the more I realize I need to do, the more overwhelmed I feel. I haven't loved this way. I haven't thought of other people first. I don't feel like I can always live up to this standard. I can never do it. This biblical standard of love is crushing me under a load of guilt and failure.

In a graduation address that broke most molds, author David Foster Wallace encouraged graduates to use their education to see people and see the world around them differently. Not just fall into their default way way of seeing people from their natural perspective. Jesus breaks the mold for love when he gives his disciples an education. Jesus uses his life to show us a different way. Jesus shows us a different kind of love. 1 John 4:10 redefines our understanding of love: **"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."** Jesus doesn't get down on the floor and start washing the feet of his disciples because he is thinking of himself. Jesus doesn't let Judas go to arrange his betrayal because of how he feels about it. Jesus isn't thinking of himself at all. If it does register what true love will cost him, he overrules those emotions by what it will mean for the people he is sent to save.

The new love Jesus tells his disciples about comes from the new heart Jesus gives.

Jesus redefines what love looks like in John 13. The context of John 13 shows us something important between the pride of the disciples and the paradigm shifting love of Jesus. In between those two interactions comes the episode where Jesus predicts the betrayal by Judas. This is key to understanding this section. This is key to realizing the route to glorification for Jesus. The betrayal by Judas set in motion the path of ultimate glory for Jesus. Perfect and flawless love for disciples meant Jesus was willing to give up everything they knew about earthly glory and power and status. This strange and remarkable love of Jesus led him to give up his life as a sacrifice for selfish sinners. Love led him to the absolute humiliation on the cross for people filled with pride. The love of Jesus is all about what he did in the place of proud disciples instead of how he felt about them.

Love that doesn't crush you under guilt can only be found in the love that caused Jesus to be crushed.

Christian love is eccentric. Today when we talk about something being eccentric, we think of it as being a little quirky or weird. But the root of the term means coming out of the center. At the center of our being, disciples of Jesus know we are loved and forgiven by Jesus. The love we have in our hearts is redefined and reframed by the love Jesus gives us. Christian love comes from the heart of Jesus. Christian author and apologist C. S. Lewis talks about what will happen if you ever encounter a truly humble person. You probably won't even notice. She won't talk about herself. She won't draw attention to herself. She will be so

focused on you or the other people around her, you won't even realize just how humble she is.

Probably a lot like Jonathan. In our first lesson today, we hear about Jonathan's love for his friend David. Jonathan had a lot to lose by helping David. He would put himself in the line of fire of his father's violent rage. Helping David would mean the possible loss of his own power and prestige. Enabling David to stay safe would mean Jonathan would probably never become king. But eccentric love allowed him to do what was best for his friend.

Freed by the love of Jesus that puts you first, God's people can be truly humble and generous. Freed from the oppression of having to use people for your own purposes allows you to sacrifice your feelings for the good of others. Thinking less about me allows me to avoid being upset, annoyed or irritated by what people do. The selfless love of Jesus overcomes my very natural sinful pride. And Jesus tells us this eccentric variety of love will stand out: **"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."** (John 13:35)

Writing about 200 years after the time of Jesus, the celebrated Church Father Tertullian says Jesus' love in action in our lives gives us brand recognition: "But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. 'See' they say 'how they love one another' for they themselves are animated by mutual hatred; 'see how they are ready even to die for one another' for they themselves will rather put to death." Jesus leaves disciples with something better than a graduation speech. He gives you his sacrificial love that has already changed the world. He equips his disciples with the forgiveness to love others with humility. He love makes all the difference in your life and has the power to change the world. Amen.