

5Easter, John 13:31-35
Rev. Kimberly Glenn
May 18, 2025

In the name of our one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Love one another as I have loved you. That is a hard call, it seems. It was one thing for the disciples to hear that while they were in the upper room with Jesus at the Last Supper that he shared with them. When you consider the whole three years of the experience the disciples had following Jesus, you see that they did not always get along. They had to work at creating a strong bond of friendship. In the process they had their share of spats. When they heard Jesus ask them to “love one another,” it was likely interpreted as something like, “you guys need to love each other and stop looking suspiciously at each other. This is not a competition between you. The twelve of you need to stop arguing and start realizing that it is not anything that you do for yourselves but rather what each of you does for each other and other people that matters.” They didn’t realize yet that ‘love one another’ included everyone, even people not like you at all, even people you think of as enemies. It was a hard enough call just to love all the people in that room.

We human beings, especially in the western world, tend to think of ourselves first. We tend to trust and love the people we know. We tend not to trust and love people that we do not know. Sometimes we feel threatened by the presence of people, sometimes we feel diminished by someone who exudes a sense of superiority. Sometimes we are offended by the things another person says or does. We are supposed to love these people? How are we supposed to do that..

I think we expect God to forgive us when we can’t love some people. We want God to make things right for them without having to be part of the solution. We want

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God to help us become good disciples of Jesus without having to change anything about our lives or our selves. We say prayers asking God to bring peace and healing to the world. We pray for unity and concord among the people of the earth, among all of God's children. Are we willing to compromise on our ideologies? Are we willing to meet and talk with people that we are in conflict with? It is hard, really hard to humble ourselves enough to see anything good in someone that we see as wrong or bad. But Jesus asks us to do just that. As Dostoevsky says, "Authentic love is a harsh and dreadful thing." It is hard to love and it is especially hard for human beings to love all human beings. We can love dogs and cats and fish and plants but loving people, especially people we presume that we don't like, is dreadfully hard. Jesus knew that, but even so, that is what he asked the disciples... and asks us... to do. How else can God bring peace and justice and mercy to the world?

Some of us went to see the movie, *The Two Popes*, on Thursday afternoon as part of our Movie Theology group. That movie explores the relationship between Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger who became Pope Benedict XVI and Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio who became Pope Francis. The two could not have been more different in personality, culture, background and style of leadership. Yet somehow they became friends. A scene in the movie showed the two of them coming together in a room at the Vatican. Pope Benedict invites Cardinal Bergoglio to sit with him after each had eaten dinner in separate rooms. Pope Benedict says, "Let's sit together here in silence." After a few moments, Cardinal Bergoglio moves over to a piano in the room. He asks Pope Benedict to play some music from an album that Benedict had produced prior to his

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papacy. The two of them began to open up and talk about music, something they both enjoyed.

There were times when Pope Benedict would say to Cardinal Bergoglio, “I disagree with everything you do and say.” But Cardinal Bergoglio was patient and believed, I think, based on the conversations they had together, that Benedict was open to seeing things in a new light. Towards the end of the movie, Benedict said very softly such that one could barely notice him saying it, “I have changed.” How much he had changed really did not matter, because once we are open to change and open to the spirit coming in and changing our hearts, it is God who determines how much change is needed.

God sent Jesus into the world to make the most pivotal change in human history. Through Jesus, God hoped to prove for once and for all that His power, his power of love, is the power above all powers. To prove that, he had to overcome the power of human violence and the power of death. To prove that Jesus had to die a violent death on the cross. There was no question that his human body was tortured, inflicting as much violence as humans could muster. He died and was buried. And then God raised him. God raised Jesus so that we would know that a new world had begun where human beings, God’s children, could know justice and mercy, forgiveness and lasting peace. The power of love, the love of God, did this. Through Jesus, God ushered in a new way of seeing and being in the world.

In the book of Acts, Peter has a vision that symbolizes the new way of being in the world that the resurrection of Jesus made clear. While in a trance, Peter sees a

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vision that helps him understand that his promise of everlasting love extends beyond the bounds of Israel. His promise extends to all people everywhere. The Spirit told Peter "to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us." Peter then realized, "who am I to hinder God?"

The inbreaking of God into the world through Jesus the Christ is considered by many scholars to be the center of human history. Through Christ, God draws all humanity to realize that it is God and not human rulers or tyrants who have control of our destinies. The thing about this new Christ centered world is that human beings need to play a starring role in it. We do that through the power of the Holy Spirit; through the power of prayer and turning to Jesus as Lord and Savior. God came to dwell with us in the person of Jesus, and die for us on the cross to redeem us for his purposes. Our purpose is to fulfill God's will, that is to let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream just as the prophet Amos said. Our purpose is to continue the mission that Jesus started, to teach and nurture and mend ailing hearts and spirits; to commit to seek and serve the least of God's children; to respect the dignity of every human being. Our purpose as followers of Christ hangs on two commandments: Love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbors, love every human being, as we love ourself.

We may find it easier to love God than to love our neighbors. Loving each other has been and continues to be very hard to do. All the division in our world, our nation, and even our churches is evidence of that. Heck, even the letters to the editor in Rappahannock Record are evidence of that. Do you remember in the nineties when

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those WWJD, that is What Would Jesus Do, bracelets were popular? People everywhere seemed to want to know what Jesus would do. If only we *had* all put into practice what Jesus would do. What would Jesus do in the case of civil division? He would probably invite people to talk and when they did he would attentively listen. He would seek the possibility of restoring relationships. He would use gentle words to redirect people's hearts and minds away from exclusion and hate. He would lead them toward inclusion and love. He would want us to commit to willing the good for all other people. The Jesus kind of love is the kind of love that is self-forgetting and self-sacrificing. It is the kind of love that takes the ego right out of the equation. It's a "not my will, but your will, Lord," kind of love.

Jesus demonstrated that kind of love over and over again. Pope Benedict and Pope Francis demonstrated that kind of love. We can demonstrate that kind of love. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to empower that kind of love among us. Let me close with the words from a cherished hymn:

Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven, to earth come down;
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,
Visit us with thy salvation,
Enter **every** trembling heart.

My friends, let the divine holy spirit enter your heart this day. We have a whole world crying out for love. Love everyone as Jesus loves us. Amen.