

Fifth Sunday of Easter-May 15, 2022

John 13:31-35

31When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33Little 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.’ 34I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Sermon:

You might be familiar with the adage that a smart person knows what to say and a wise person knows when to say it. When Jesus says what he says, it augments the power of his command that we love one another.

So when? The first five words—“when he had gone out” are more ominous when you read what has just happened.

Judas had gone out, into the night, intent on betraying Jesus. Jesus knew this was going to happen. Knowing what he knows, Jesus still washes everyone’s feet. Jesus still extends hospitality to everyone at the table; including Judas who would betray him and Peter who would deny being one of his followers.

A community is unravelling from within-squabbling for prominence and dominance. Just beyond the doors where they share a meal, Judas strides into the night— committed to handing Jesus and his followers over to the unholy alliance of the occupying empire and a coalition of religious authorities.

We can’t un-see, un-hear or un-know what’s happening. Jesus words weigh more now—and they confuse us more at the same time. Jesus says the Son of Man is glorified and a greater glory is at hand.

Where is glory in apparent defeat and immanent arrest? How does vulnerability and nonviolence outshine ruthless power and brute force?

I'm not sure we as the whole church have totally gotten our heads and hearts around that one yet. Maybe God's got more work cut out to be done among us...and more work for us to do.

The command to love one another is rescued from a vague sentiment to a call to live as Jesus did; motivated by love. Love takes the form of caring for those over looked...the vulnerable and neglected.

I appreciate the comments from the teacher and preacher Dr. Elisabeth Johnson...because she teaches in Cameroon, I suspect her lens is attenuated differently. She warns against becoming insular as community thinking, we're "loving one another". Love isn't only in-house...or for those we agree with...or who are like us. Professor Johnson quotes one of the most quoted lines from John's Gospel...God so loves the world.

Jesus says we will be known by how we love one another. Osvaldo Vena is a retired professor of New Testament study and he reflects on the ways we're known in the world. We're people of the cross, he says. Christians adopted the symbol to point God's self giving—a life we're called to participate in. As the cross became more about colonialism and power, its meaning becomes more ambiguous. Professor Vena invites us to imagine what the world might be like if Jesus' followers also adopted as a symbol the basin and the towel.

How might people of the basin and towel relate to each other differently? How might such people relate to our neighbourhoods and to society—the world— at large?

Jesus says how we love is how others will know us. As a colleague of mine says, he may not always say he's Christian, yet he wants others to see Christ in how he lives his life.

There is a lot of confusion these days about what Christians are about—so when names like "evangelical" or even Lutheran are bandied around, we're not sure what that's about. Wouldn't it be great though if the first thing people associated with us is how much we care for the world—just as God loves the world?

You are right in thinking we've got our work cut out for us. We're like a macrocosm of Jesus' first followers....We don't always get it-

we're diverse and sometimes divided—sometimes bitterly so.

We're zealous and sometimes given to selfish ambition..

There are times we sell out our loyalties for an easier or more prosperous path.

Here is the Good News: God knows us. Jesus knows us. True to form, Jesus continues to forgive, nurture, heal, and challenge us. Some of us lean into baptism as a daily reality where God starts fresh with us...freeing us from the grip of deathly ways and freeing us for lives of hope and love. What would things be like if that's what people saw when they looked at Christian people?

Can and would God fashion us to be that sort of people? Jesus' command for us to love one another would suggest that Yes-God is still at work forming us into basin and towel people...May it be so among us.