

LOVE EACH OTHER...SO THAT...*by Rev. Elaine Poproski*

Jesus had a last meal with his disciples before he was arrested, tried, and crucified. Jesus knew it was his last meal. He knew it was his last chance to say all the things he wanted to say. You know, it's something of a gift to know beforehand that your life is ending. It gives you a chance to tie up loose ends, to patch up damaged relationships, to say your goodbyes, to tell the people you love that you love them, and to impart any final words of wisdom and advice. That's what Jesus was doing around the table at that last supper with his disciples.

The moment Judas left the table and went out into the night, it was as if everything that would happen over the next few days had already happened. There was no way out of it. There was no way around it. Judas' departure was the spark that set in motion a series of events that Jesus knew would end in his death.

In John 13:31, Jesus turns to the remaining disciples and says this:

Now the Son of Man...

[That's one of the ways Jesus used to refer to himself – as the Son of Man. It's a title that comes out of Daniel 7, in which Daniel was relaying a vision he had of God's ultimate judgment and the end of all evil in the world. This is what we read in Daniel 7:13 – 14:

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days [that's a reference to God] and was led into his presence.¹⁴ He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

This is what Jesus intended his disciples to envision when he referred to himself as the Son of Man. He intended for them to see in him, not just their friend and teacher, but the one to whom God would give everlasting dominion over God's own kingdom. Jesus intended for them to see in him, the one to whom God would give authority, glory, and sovereign power. He intended for them to see him as the incarnated Word of God.

This is heady stuff. If Judas hadn't already left, I'm sure he would have left now. For a mere man to equate himself with the one like a Son of Man from Daniel's vision was the height of blasphemy. He was elevating himself to the place of God.

Let's return to John 13, reading at verse 31:

When [Judas] had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him.³² If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once."

I don't know about you, but I find that all those *glorified's* make these two verses a bit challenging to understand. I find when a word is repeated over and over again, especially a word

I don't really understand, it's helpful to replace the word with some synonyms – other words that mean the same thing. The problem I ran into when trying to do that here, is that there aren't really any great synonyms we can use here. That's because the word glory, and all its derivatives, means something bigger than any one word.

When we talk about God's glory, what we're talking about is his divine nature – everything about who he is. Sometimes that divine nature is described as a kind of radiance or a glow. At the very end of Exodus, we read that Moses set up the Tent of Meeting – the Tabernacle, which was the place God would meet with his priests. When it was built and ready to be used, we read that “a cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.”ⁱ

In Exodus 24 we're told that Moses went up Mount Sinai to meet with God. We're told that a cloud covered the mountain and we're told that “the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai.”ⁱⁱ Then we're told that to the people on the ground, “the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain.”ⁱⁱⁱ

It's like God's glory and God's presence are one and the same. God's glory isn't an aspect of his character, it's the totality of who he is. Moses saw God's glory – saw God – in the cloud and in the fire. But it's not just revealed in these kinds of visual Old Testament manifestations. It's also revealed in God's various acts in creation and in history.

Psalms 19 proclaims: The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

Psalms 96 instructs: Declare [God's] glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the people.

The things God does reveal who God is. God's glory is known by his acts. And no act so completely reveals God's glory – God himself – as the act of sending his Son. Listen to how Paul describes that act in Philippians 2, by describing Jesus this way:

⁶ though he existed in the form of God,
[he] did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped,
⁷ but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
assuming human likeness.

We start with Jesus existing in the form of God. In other words, Jesus shared the glory of God. God's glory was Jesus' glory, because God and Jesus were one.

But Jesus emptied himself. He emptied himself of the divine nature – the glory of God – in order to become one of us.

That's where we are when we come back to John 13, trying to make sense of Jesus' words to his disciples. Again, this is what he said, beginning in verse 31:

“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.”

Judas' departure from the table was the beginning of the end for Jesus. Jesus' arrest was only hours away. His crucifixion and death were less than a day away. These events were unavoidable by this point. And so Jesus could speak to his disciples as if they'd already happened.

Jesus knew that his death wasn't the end. He knew that when Daniel envisioned "one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven, approaching the Ancient of Days to be given authority, glory, and sovereign power," Daniel was envisioning him. This is why Jesus could speak as if it had already happened. That's why he said to his disciples, "Now the Son of Man *has been* glorified."

He is returning to the Father. He is returning to his place in the Trinity. He is returning to full participation in the glory of God. That is what it means that he has been glorified.

When Jesus says that "God has been glorified in him," he's pointing to the whole thing – his own crucifixion and resurrection, defeating sin and death for good and for all time. Nothing so clearly reveals God's glory as this story of Jesus. So Jesus says to his disciples, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified and God has been glorified in him." And just to drive the point home, he says it again slightly differently, but with the same meaning. "If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once."

So much is packed into those few phrases. There's no way to read them without being awed by the true nature of Jesus – his divine nature – his real identity as the Word of God who was with God in the beginning, who was, in fact, God.^{iv}

And then this Word of God – this glory of the Lord – this Jesus says to his disciples, "Little children..." Such a term of endearment, of love. There's such familiarity in that address. It's so personal. It seems so contrary to the glory of God we were just contemplating. But that's Jesus, isn't it? That's God. He is at one and the same time so completely and utterly beyond our comprehension, a mystery who inspires awe and fear, and he is a gentle, kind father who cares about the smallest things in our lives because he cares about us.

"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..."

Jesus has only hours left with them. This that he's about to say to them is his instruction – his direction for life after Jesus.

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

Think for a moment about how Jesus loved them. What did it look like? How did he behave toward them? How did he speak to them?

Earlier in John 13, near the beginning of this last meal with his disciples, we read that Jesus "got up from supper, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him."^v

Jesus took the place of a servant. Jesus saw a need and met it. Jesus loved them.

“Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

What does that mean? What does it look like?

I think it looks like Jesus knowing them intimately. He knew who they were – what made them tick, what they loved, what tempted them. He didn’t begrudge them their weaknesses and their doubts, but gently met them there. Think about that story of Thomas, who missed Jesus’ miraculous arrival in the Upper Room after his resurrection (but before they realized he’d been resurrected). Thomas didn’t believe the other disciples when they said they’d seen Jesus. So Jesus came back. And he went straight to Thomas. And he didn’t yell or complain or lay down guilt. Instead, he offered exactly what Thomas needed. Proof.^{vi}

“Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

What does that mean? What does it look like?

In the first chapter of Mark, we read about a time when the disciples went with Jesus to Simon and Andrew’s house. When they got there, they discovered that Simon’s mother-in-law was sick with a fever. Jesus healed her.^{vii} He had compassion on her (and on Simon and Andrew, I think) and he healed her.

“Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

I hope you’ll take some time this week to look for more examples of Jesus loving his disciples. What does it mean to love like Jesus loved? What does it look like?

If we look beyond examples of Jesus specifically loving his disciples, to the ways he loved everyone, we get an even richer picture of what it means to love like he loved.

After Jesus’ cousin, John the Baptist, was beheaded by Herod, Jesus needed a bit of time. He needed some quiet and some space to grieve. But the crowds found him and came from all over. And Jesus, we’re told by Matthew, “had compassion on them and healed those who were ill.”^{viii} I think compassion is a great descriptor of love.

“Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

Of course, the greatest example of Jesus’ love is his willingness to go to the cross, despite the excruciating pain, because he loved us so much it was even more painful to leave us lost in our sin – lost in death.

“Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

These are among Jesus’ last words to his disciples. He didn’t say them by accident. He meant them. Even if he hadn’t said them out loud, I can’t imagine how anyone could call themselves a follower of Jesus and not think it includes loving each other like he loved. This is his commandment, that we love each other like he loved his disciples.

But here's the thing I think we sometimes forget. Loving each other is important in and of itself. But, Jesus didn't leave the command standing on its own. He added this:

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”^{ix}

The command to love isn't just for our own sake. It's for the sake of the world. It's part of the way we bear witness to who Jesus was – to who Jesus is. Because bearing witness is what we're supposed to be about. Jesus did not establish a secret society. He didn't establish a private club. When Jesus was no longer with them, his work was meant to continue. His disciples were meant to carry on – to carry Jesus' work forward.

Jesus' work was that of proclaiming that the kingdom of God had come near and inviting people to repent and believe. But he didn't just wander around preaching his message, he lived it. At one point, when John the Baptist was in prison and feeling pretty low, he sent a couple of his disciples to Jesus to ask directly if Jesus was the one they'd been waiting for – the Messiah. Jesus could have preached a sermon or done some teaching, but instead this is what he said, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.”^x

Jesus' work was about living out the reality that God's kingdom had come near. His work was about exemplifying that kingdom in his own life and in the way he interacted with his disciples. The goal was always that other people would choose to also live out the reality that God's kingdom had come near. That's the gospel message. God's kingdom – a kingdom of justice and peace, a kingdom in which the weak are made strong and the marginalized are brought in from the cold – God's kingdom has come. Certainly it has yet to be fully realized, but in Jesus and in the continued presence of the Holy Spirit, God's kingdom is among us.

Jesus said to his disciples, “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” Why? Because that is how “everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

What's not said, but is implied, I think, is that as people witness the way the disciples love each other, they won't just know the disciples belong to Jesus, they'll want to also belong to Jesus. Isn't this the hope? That all people would know what it is to be loved by Jesus? That all people would be able to imagine God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven? That all people would want to be part of God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven?

If Jesus were standing right here in front of us this morning. If we could hear him saying to us, “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” How would you respond? How would you answer? What does it look like, today, for you to love other Walmer people as Jesus loved? What might it be that Jesus is asking of you this morning?

Let's take a minute or two to reflect on these two related questions.

What does it look like, today, for you to love other Walmer people as Jesus loved?

What might it be that Jesus is asking of you this morning?

-
- ⁱ Exodus 40:34.
 - ⁱⁱ Exodus 24:16.
 - ⁱⁱⁱ Exodus 24:17.
 - ^{iv} John 1:1.
 - ^v John 13:4-5.
 - ^{vi} John 20:24-28.
 - ^{vii} Mark 1:29-31.
 - ^{viii} Matthew 14:14.
 - ^{ix} John 13:35.
 - ^x Matthew 11:4-5.