

SUNDAY, MAY 15, 2022
EASTER 5C – TRADITIONAL
JOHN 13:31-35

IF I WERE TO ASK YOU WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CHRISTIAN, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY? HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN TO SOMEONE ABOUT CHRISTIANITY? YOU MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO COME UP WITH SOME THEOLOGICAL MEANING, BUT OUR TEXT TODAY IS JESUS' FINAL ATTEMPT BEFORE HIS IMPENDING DEATH TO EXPLAIN AS CLEARLY AS HE CAN TO HIS DISCIPLES, WHAT IT MEANS TO FOLLOW HIM.

THIS IS JESUS' LAST ATTEMPT TO SAY WHAT HE WANTS TO SAY. AND INSTEAD OF ADDRESSING HIS DISCIPLES AS STUDENTS, HE ADDRESSES THEM WITH THE INTIMACY THAT THE MOMENT CALLS FOR. "LITTLE CHILDREN", HE SAYS TO GROWN MEN, "LISTEN TO ME NOW. I AM GETTING READY TO GO TO A PLACE WHERE YOU CANNOT COME, SO IT'S IMPORTANT THAT WE HAVE THIS TIME TOGETHER."

MANY OF US HAVE EXPERIENCED SOMETHING SIMILAR – AN INTENSE, FINAL CONVERSATION WITH SOMEONE WE LOVE WHO KNEW THEY WOULD NOT BE WITH US MUCH LONGER. IT'S A TRULY SACRED TIME THAT WE REMEMBER FOR THE REST OF OUR LIVES. AS A PASTOR, I HAVE HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF WITNESSING MANY SUCH CONVERSATION THAT, WHILE MEANT FOR SOMEONE OTHER THAN ME, HAVE PROFOUNDLY TOUCHED ME DEEPLY.

IN THE SAME WAY, WE ARE MEANT TO REMEMBER THESE WORDS OF JESUS IN A WAY THAT IS FITTING OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH HE SPEAKS THEM.

"I GIVE YOU A NEW COMMANDMENT," HE SAYS SO SIMPLY, THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER." THAT'S IT. AS D.A. CARSON SAYS IN HIS COMMENTARY ON JOHN, THIS NEW COMMANDMENT IS SIMPLE ENOUGH FOR A TODDLER TO MEMORIZE AND APPRECIATE, AND IT IS PROFOUND ENOUGH THAT THE MOST MATURE BELIEVERS ARE REPEATEDLY EMBARRASSED ST HOW POORLY THEY COMPREHEND IT AND PUT IT INTO PRACTICE."

"BY THIS EVERYONE WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YOU HAVE LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER." (V 35)

SEE, BEING A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST IS JUST THAT SIMPLE, BECAUSE JESUS MEANT FOR IT TO BE A LOVE AFFAIR. IT BEGINS WITH GOD REACHING OUT TO US IN BAPTISM, WHERE WE ARE

CLEANSED FROM THE THINGS WHICH MOST ASHAME US, GOD'S LOVE WASHES OVER US WITH A LOVE THAT FREES, COMPELS, AND MAKES NEW THE HEARTS OF THOSE WHO RECEIVE IT.

SEE, JESUS GIVES THIS NEW COMMANDMENT, THAT WE LOVE ONE ANOTHER, NOT BECAUSE WE ARE LOVEABLE, BUT BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US. AND IT'S ROOTED IN THE MIRACLE THAT JESUS CAN FILL US WITH THE WILL TO DO FOR OTHERS EVEN WHEN WE DON'T FEEL ANYTHING AT ALL. IT IS ROOTED IN THE GOD-GIVEN ABILITY TO SET ASIDE OUR OWN POSITION AND POWER AND PREJUDICES – TO SET ASIDE OUR OWN NEEDS AND WANTS AND DESIRES, IN ORDER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR SOMEONE ELSE.

BUT IT'S NOT ALWAYS EASY. I WAS SPEAKING TO A BRAND NEW PARENT THE OTHER DAY, AND HE WAS TELLING ME HOW THE BABY WOULD WAKE UP SEVERAL TIMES A NIGHT WANTING TO BE HELD, OR CHANGED, OR FED. HE SAID, AS A PARENT, IT HAS COME DOWN TO WHICH ONE OF US COULD FAKE BEING ASLEEP TILL THE OTHER WOULD GET OUT OF BED, AND THEN SAY A FEW GROGGY WORDS AS THE OTHER WAS HEADED FOR THE DOORWAY – AS IF TO SAY, "I WOULD HAVE GOTTEN UP AND HELPED, BUT I'M JUST A HEAVY SLEEPER." THAT WAY YOU COULD GET CREDIT FOR HAVING GOOD INTENTIONS, AND THE LUXURY OF STAYING IN BED AT THE SAME TIME.

SEE, THIS LOVE ONE ANOTHER THING IS NOT AS SIMPLE AS IT MAY FIRST SEEM.

HOW EMBARRASSING IT IS FOR US TO RECALL THAT JESUS WANTED TO MAKE IT EASY FOR US BY HAVING US FOCUS ON THIS ONE THING; YET WE HAVE FOUND SO MANY OTHER WAYS TO DEFINE WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HIS FOLLOWER, AND WE OFTEN HAVE A HARD TIME PUTTING THIS COMMANDMENT INTO PRACTICE, EVEN IN OUR OWN FAMILY LIVES.

JESUS DOESN'T TALK ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BIBLE, OR OUR CAREFULLY CONSTRUCTED CREED. THE NEW TESTAMENT WOULDN'T EVEN BE WRITTEN UNTIL TWO GENERATIONS AFTER JESUS' DEATH, AND THE NICENE CREED WOULD BE HAMMERED OUT BY COMBATIVE THEOLOGIANS OVER THE NEXT 350 YEARS. AND THESE TWO THINGS, THE BIBLE AND THE CREED WOULD BECOME TERRIBLY IMPORTANT TO HUMAN BEINGS OVER THE YEARS, WHILE THE ONE THING MOST IMPORTANT TO JESUS WOULD GET LOST AS CHRISTIANS WRESTLED WITH POWER AND ORTHODOXY.

SEE, JESUS'S WAY WAS THE WAY OF THE LITTLE CHILDREN, NOT THE WAY OF LEARNED THEOLOGIANS AND INTELLIGENT PREACHERS.

“LITTLE CHILDREN,” HE SAYS, “I GIVE YOU A NEW COMMANDMENT THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER.”

THE COMMANDMENT IS NOT ABOUT WHAT YOU BELIEVE, BUT ABOUT HOW YOU LIVE.

AND THE NEWNESS OF THIS COMMANDMENT IS NOT THAT LOVE HAS NEVER BEEN COMMANDED BEFORE (LOOK AT LEVITICUS 19:18). THE NEWNESS IS IN THE SOURCE THAT FEEDS THIS LOVE; THE HUMILITY OF GOD AS REVEALED THROUGH CHRIST’S DEATH. AND WE ARE NOT SIMPLY TO USE WORDS TO TELL PEOPLE ABOUT THE MEANING OF THE CROSS AND RESURRECTION, WE ARE TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS A WAY OF EMBODYING THE TRUTH OF THAT LOVE REVEALED THROUGH HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

AND OF COURSE, THE OPPOSITE IS ALSO TRUE. WHEN YOU AND I FAIL TO SERVE ONE ANOTHER, BECAUSE WE ARE UNWILLING TO FORGIVE, BECAUSE WE WON’T SWALLOW OUR PRIDE, BECAUSE THE TASK IS SOMEHOW BENEATH US, BECAUSE IT’S EASIER TO LET SOMEONE ELSE DO IT – WHATEVER THE REASON, THEN JESUS’ LOVE GOES UNNOTICED, UNWITNESSED.

SEE, THE FACT IS, THAT PEOPLE ARE LOOKING AT US. LOOKING AT ST. JOHN’S AND WONDERING WHAT SORT OF PEOPLE WORSHIP HERE. WONDERING IF THEY CAME HERE, WOULD THEY BE ACCEPTED. WONDERING WHAT WE VALUE. “BY THIS EVERYONE WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES,” JESUS TOLD THEM, “IF YOU HAVE LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER.”

WHEN THEY FINALLY PREPARE TO EAT, JESUS BREAKS THE LOAF OF BREAD SAYING THE WORDS WE REPEAT EACH WEEK, “THIS IS MY BODY GIVEN FOR YOU, THIS IS MY BLOOD SHED FOR YOU. DO THIS TO REMEMBER ME.”

DO THIS... I THINK HE WAS TALKING ABOUT MUCH MORE THAN COMMUNION. DO THIS. LET YOUR HEART BE BROKEN BY THE THINGS THAT BREAK GOD’S HEART. DO THIS. COME TO THE TABLE AND BE FILLED, SO THAT YOU CAN POUR YOURSELF OUT IN SERVICE TO THOSE AROUND YOU. DO THIS. EMPTY YOURSELF ON BEHALF OF OTHERS, AND IN DOING SO, BECOME PART OF GOD’S UNFOLDING PROMISE TO MEND THE WORLD.

WHEN YOU GIVE AND EXPECT NOTHING IN RETURN, WHEN YOU COOK A MEAL, MOW A LAWN, OFFER A RIDE, MOP A FLOOR, PAY A COMPLIMENT, SHOULDER THE BLAME, SHARE THE

BURDEN, YOU BLESS THE HEART OF JESUS. AND YOU OFFER A GLIMPSE OF HIS KINGDOM HERE ON EARTH.

WHEN WE ALLOW THE LOVE OF JESUS TO TAKE DEEP ROOT IN US, SO THAT IT FLOURISHES IN ALL THAT WE DO AND SAY TO ONE ANOTHER, IT IS THE FIRST STEP IN HELPING THE WORLD AROUND US TO UNDERSTAND CHRIST AND WHAT HE HAS DONE FOR US. WE GIVE WITNESS TO WHAT NO PURELY VERBAL ARGUMENT CAN EVER ACCOMPLISH – THE LOVE OF GOD BREATHING THROUGH THE LIFE OF A COMMUNITY CENTERED ON JESUS AND THE LOVE HE COMMANDS US TO SHARE. IN HIS NAME. AMEN!