

Fifth Sunday of Easter

John 13:31-35

May 18+19, 2025 at Grace, Manitowoc, WI

### Love One Another

We sure do love Jesus here at Grace. You hear it so clearly from the little kids who go to preschool at Jesus' Lambs of Grace. You can see it in the smiles and warm welcomes for our friends and family in Christ when we gather for worship, when we chat over coffee and snacks afterward. You can feel the love in the air as we join together to serve our Lord. It's not hard to see that we love Jesus and we love one another.

But can *other* people tell we love one another? Allow me to share a brief personal story. While I was studying to be a pastor, I had two co-workers at different jobs, but they both shared a similar perspective. They knew what I was studying, and they had a general sense of Christianity from their own previous church experiences. But they were both a little disappointed in how I treated them, so they confronted me. How could I study to be a pastor, someone who wanted to share the love of Jesus, and be so rude to them?

You see, these weren't my favorite co-workers to interact with. Their personality didn't mesh well with me. They had a bit too much energy, and they did their job in a different way than I did. I thought I could get by just by avoiding them. We could each do our own work and be cordial and call it good at that. But they noticed. These guys could tell I was giving them a bit of the cold shoulder. And good for them, they called me out! Aren't Christians supposed to love one another? For at least one of them, that's why he struggled with going back to church.

As we continue to rejoice and revel in our Easter joy, we *are* looking forward. Certainly, we're looking ahead to that day when Jesus will return and take us to heaven. Jesus is only gone for a little while. Everything's going to be changed in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye. But Jesus doesn't just want us to live by ourselves and get along till this life is done. He gives his disciples a new command - and that includes you and me: love one another. Let others know that you love Jesus and that HE loves THEM by loving one another. Then, they get to know the same Easter joy and look forward to heaven with us.

For a little bit of context, it's good to know *when* Jesus gave this new command. John 13 falls pretty near the middle of this book of the Bible, but it's actually pretty near the *end* of Jesus' life. All of chapters 13-17 happen

on Holy, or Maundy, Thursday. In this section, we hear Jesus passionately teach his disciples for one last night and then pray from the depths of his heart. Jesus lifted this prayer up to his Father - for himself, for those friends, and for all those future believers who would know him and trust him. It's incredible to hear and see the love Jesus showed all in that one evening.

Jesus shared an intimate meal with his closest friends. They lounged around the table, sharing this special holiday of the Passover, remembering how God delivered their ancestors. They passed around bread and wine, and on that evening, Jesus gave them a new meal to celebrate: **“This is my body, given for you; this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”** This is how Jesus loved them, and we still celebrate that love today in the Lord's Supper.

Even before that, their master showed another side of love. When travelers came together for a meal after walking along the dusty road, typically a servant would wash their feet. When Jesus and his band of brothers sat down, no one stepped up (or rather, lowered himself) to do this job. Jesus took the opportunity to show them how to love one another. The one they called Teacher and Lord made himself their servant. The disciples constantly argued about who was the greatest among, and here Jesus taught them the greatest love. To humble yourself. To put others' needs above yours. The love of Christ says no task is too low, nothing is beneath him.

As Jesus continued to teach his friends that evening, he explained what it meant to love one another as he loved them. Not just showing hospitality with soap and water and a shared meal among friends. Jesus said, **“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.”** And that's just what Jesus did. God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son to live and die. The Son of Man didn't just come for this group of close friends, not just for the crowds who saw him, who got to hear him and touch him and be fed by him. Not just for the Jews who had longed to see their Messiah and go with him into his kingdom. God so loved the *world*.

This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us - even while we were sinners. That's why Jesus' life, suffering, and death brings so much honor and glory to God. It's not hard to love people who are likeable, who are attractive and appealing and nice to us. But where's the honor in only showing love to those who love you in return? Who's going to give you any credit for liking the people who are similar to you?

But God's love is unexpected and undeserved. There's no reason for God to like us. We are stuck up, self-centered sinners who desire our own glory, not God's glory. By nature, we are enemies of God, not his friends, not his family. We have offended God by our thoughts, words, and actions. Every day we behave like that annoying person you want nothing to do with, like that bully you wish was out of your life, that jerk who makes your life miserable. Why should God love us?

That's how incredible God's love is! When there was nothing in us that would make us desirable to God, he wanted us. When we were disgusting, God longed to make us clean. When we were his enemies, he sought to adopt us as his children - so much that he gave up his own Son. *Jesus* loved us so much that he laid down his life for people he called his friends. As true God, Jesus knew everything he would endure as he made this sacrifice - all the pain, ridicule, agony, death itself. As true Man, Jesus really did bear all that suffering. Because it was his glory. It was his greatest work - to love the world, his most precious treasure.

This is the Jesus we know. What a friend we have in Jesus! How deep the Father's love for us! Amazing grace! We sing of this love over and over again. And we so desperately want others to know Jesus' love so that they may glorify our Father in heaven and one day be home with us and Jesus. How will they know this saving message? When we love one another.

How *do* you love one another? Again, we see so many great examples happening around us here at Grace. We've had the privilege in the last months to celebrate two faithful servants who have given their time and efforts week in and week out to work in our office. Thanks be to God for the love these ladies have shown! There have been so many regularly serving as ushers, greeters, working with LiveStream and the PowerPoint slides, making music with voices and instruments, providing food, teaching all ages, making crafts, cleaning the inside and outside of our church, preparing and folding bulletins, sending out cards, contacting people, leading on our council, and a whole list of other things I'm sure I'm forgetting. There are countless opportunities to serve just within our congregation.

But *they* - those people on the "outside" - they don't always see this. If the "one another" that we're loving is just the people who come within our walls, how will the others know? When we limit our love to people like us, who already know and love Jesus, are we living as Christ's followers? Jesus didn't limit his love to "church people." When Jesus modeled how to love

one another, he included all kinds of people - Jews like him and foreigners not like him; the learned and the commoners; men and women and children; the sinners and the tax collectors; those who believed and those who rejected him. The love of Jesus is a love for all.

Are there people in your life whom you struggle to love, like I did (and often still do)? Someone whose personality just grates on you, that it's hard to have a conversation with, someone you'd rather just avoid? Someone who is hostile to you, and you want to retaliate with hate? It's hard to love people who aren't like you. Do you love the person across the political aisle? Do you love people with a different skin tone, who speak a different language, who didn't grow up in middle-class, white America? Do you love someone who struggles with a different sin than you do, who you can't understand? The love of Christ is for the divorced, for those plagued by the guilt of past sins, for those wrestling with drug addiction or trying to fight off same-sex attraction. The love of Christ is for that unhoused family.

Maybe you struggle to love people close to you, who have hurt you. Should we "love one another" if the other person is abusive? Should children love their parents who don't model the love of Christ? Should we love people who show by their words and actions that their hearts are far from Jesus? At times like these, we look again to that love of Jesus. His love led him to speak strongly to those in the clutches of sin, to call out to them, "Repent!" The love of Jesus, who wants all people to be saved, will point out how dangerous and serious sin is. And when God works on hearts, as he does, the love of Jesus proclaims forgiveness and restoration to those broken hearts. This doesn't always mean earthly reconciliation. Not every relationship can be made fixed here and now. But the love of Christ will make all things new. He still forgives and saves all sinners.

So, we love one another. The love of God led Jesus to lay down his life for us to pay for all our lovelessness. Because Jesus lives, his love lives on in us. God has showered us with such overflowing love that his goodness pours out of us into the lives of others. I pray that you can see the opportunities to love one another, here at Grace, out in your community circles, within your homes, and across the world. Love one another with patience, kindness, selflessness, and gentleness. Take the time to get to know someone, to understand their struggle, and to share the love of Christ with them. As you ponder Jesus' love for you, see how his love touches the stories of everyone around you. As Jesus has loved us, may we all love one another. Amen.