

## Fifth Sunday of Easter “Jesus Teaches How to Love”

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My friends, you have heard this from me before, we can summarize the Bible in three scripture passages. Ready? First John 4:16 tells us God is love. Genesis chapter 1:26-27 says we are made in the image and likeness of this God who is love. What are we supposed to do then? In 1 Corinthians chapter 13, St. Paul says, without love we are nothing. In the Gospel of John today, Jesus tells us, I give you a new commandment: love one another as I have loved you. God is love. We are made in the image and likeness of this God who is love. Therefore, love. The meaning of life is that easy and yet very hard. Why? We have troubles loving as we ought.

Case in point, notice how Jesus gave this commandment at the last supper after Judas had left them? You see, Judas wasn't open to this Gospel of love Jesus was preaching because he wanted to promote the Gospel of Judas, which at the moment was collecting thirty pieces of silver in exchange for betraying the Lord. You see, Judas was not interested in the Gospel of serving others. He was interested in the Gospel of serving himself.

Now, biblically, love is not about serving ourselves but about serving others. It is like the Philippians hymn, Jesus did not deem equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself to become one like us. That word “empty” in Greek is *kenosis* and has become an important word or idea in theology that describes love as self-diffusing or self-emptying. I believe we see the idea of *kenosis* implied in our second reading from Revelation. In this passage God is described at the end of days as making his dwelling with the human race promising to be with us always, wiping away tears, and making all things new. God is described in this passage as self-emptying himself for us, loving us more than himself. Contrast that with St. Augustine's definition of sin. For St. Augustine, he described sin in Latin as *incurvatus in se*, or a curving inward of the soul. You see, that is why Judas left before Jesus could teach the disciples about love. He had curved into himself, making himself more important others. This made him incapable of love.

So, if sin is a curving inward of the soul, love then is *kenosis*, a self-emptying, or a curving outward of the soul. I believe this is why the most perfect sacrament Jesus offers us is Holy Eucharist. In the Holy Eucharist, Jesus gives us his very body, blood, soul and divinity as food and drink. Once again, we have a model of love based on *kenosis*, self-emptying, or the curving of the soul outwards towards others. You see, when we receive the Lord in the Holy Eucharist and become one with him, we too are called to self-empty ourselves for others. That is what real love looks like.

To go even further with this, remember how Jesus taught his disciples over and over again to not be people who hate their enemies and only love their friends. Remember that? He said, what merit do we receive from that? Even the worst of sinners love their friends and hate their enemies. Clearly, central to Jesus' teaching on love includes the challenge to love even our enemies. What does that look like? Speaking for myself, when it comes to the challenge of loving our enemies, I think it is helpful sometimes to distinguish between the words “love” and “like”. Does Jesus expect us to “like” everyone who hurts us or is unjust to us? I don't believe

that is what he means at all. I say this because I believe that there were likely many emotions going on inside of Jesus in his humanity when he was crucified on the cross. I don't think "liking" the people who were crucifying him was one of them. He sure did love them though. He sure did love them. He loved them and the whole human race enough to die for us for the sake of our salvation. Similarly, when someone hurts us or is unjust to us, I don't think it is realistic to expect ourselves to like these people. We are on to love them however. We are on to love them. Jesus shows us how.

This is really, really hard as we all know. This is not easy! And so, before we go further, I invite you to think of all the people in your life that you have a good reason not to love. This part should be easy given the dangerous world in which we live, or given the polarization of our political leadership in our country. However, usually the most painful hurts we experience in life come from those who are closest to us. You see, all of us at some point or another have suffered a broken relationship or a breach of trust of someone close to us. Sometimes these hurts can feel just about as bad as what Judas did to Jesus. The question becomes, how do we love them? What does that look like?

I think we all know. We begin to demonstrate our love for the difficult people in our lives by praying for them, do we not? It starts there. Through prayer, praying for their conversion, working toward justice rather than vengeance, watching what we say, and seeking the higher road in how we conduct ourselves, we demonstrate our love for the difficult people in our lives. We do. What does this kind of love feel like? If we are honest with ourselves, it doesn't always feel good at first. This kind of love can feel, wait for it, self-emptying. Self-emptying. However, if we reflect a moment on how we feel when we practice self-emptying love, we just might then begin to understand the depth of Jesus' love for us, perhaps for the first time. Following Jesus' example, we begin to appreciate more and more how love is not always about how we feel but more about what we do and the choices we make. In everything that we do, from our personal relationships, our relationships at work, and our relationships in our community and world, discipleship understands that love looks like *kenosis*, not *incurvatus in se*.