

## Easter 5C 2022 Sermon

*John 13:31-35*

*At the last supper, when Judas had gone out, Jesus said, “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. 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, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

The setting of today’s passage from the Gospel of John is Jesus’ Last Supper with his disciples, the night before he will be crucified. Jesus has just washed his disciples’ feet. He has just told Judas, “Do quickly what you are going to do” (v. 27) – and Judas has left the supper to betray him. Jesus knows that Peter will deny him that very night – not once, but three times (v. 38); and he also knows that he will soon be crucified. *This* is the context in which he gives the new commandment, “Love one another, *as I have loved you.*”

Biblical scholar Karoline Lewis notes that *without* this contextual “framework, [Jesus’ command] becomes another biblical platitude quoted by those who think it’s easy and who rarely stick to it themselves. It ends up on posters with the backdrop being some sort of idyllic scene of an ocean, snow-capped mountains... or birds flying across a bright blue sky”<sup>1</sup> with the decorative words, “Love one another, just as I have loved you.” We must never forget that this commandment is given in the context of Jesus’ imminent betrayal, denial, abandonment, and crucifixion. “Love one another, *just as I have loved you*” – is far from a platitude; it is a commandment that requires the kind of courage, strength, and self-emptying love that Jesus displays on the cross.

Now, you may be asking yourself, “Why does Jesus say that this is a *new* commandment? Doesn’t the Old Testament book of Leviticus command, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’? (Lev. 19:18) And doesn’t Jesus *quote* that commandment in other Gospels? (Mark 12:31, Matthew 22:37-39, Luke 10:24)

Yes; but the *new* commandment that Jesus gives us in **today’s** Gospel is not, “Love your neighbor *as yourself*,” but, “Love one another, *just as I have loved you.*” In the *first* commandment, the way we are to love our neighbor is likened to the way we love *ourselves*; but in this *new* commandment, the way we are to love one another is likened to the way *Jesus* loves us. And the nature and extent of Jesus’ love for his disciples, for us, and for all people and all Creation, is supremely manifested in his willingness to pour out his life on the cross.

And so, no; the background for the words, “Love one another” should not be an idyllic scene of an ocean, snow-capped mountains, or birds flying across a bright

blue sky. The background for the words, “Love one another, just as I have loved you” should be a cross, which, in John’s Gospel, reveals God’s glory.

I looked up the word “glory” in a dictionary of Biblical Greek, and I discovered that in the Bible, “glory” almost always refers to the **revelation** of God’s true nature.<sup>2</sup> So, when Jesus, in today’s Gospel, states, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him,” he is saying that **now** the divine nature is being revealed in him – on this very night of betrayal, denial, and abandonment; and this divine nature is about to be *fully* revealed on a cross. *This* sense of “glorify” is captured by *The Message* translation of today’s opening verse, which reads: “Now the Son of Man is seen for who he is.” (13:31) Now the Son of Man is seen for who he is.

And, who **is** he? What **is** the divine nature that is being revealed in him? It is Love – a love that willingly suffers betrayal and abandonment, a love that willingly suffers pain, a love that lays down its life for its friends, a love that conquers death. This kind of costly, unconditional, self-emptying love is God’s true nature, God’s glory, and Jesus’ glory. *And* it is the glory to which WE are called as followers of Jesus.

Now, according to my Bible dictionary, there is a distinction between how God’s glory is understood in the *Old* Testament and the way God’s glory is portrayed in the *New* Testament. “In the **Old** Testament the stress lies on **seeing** the divine [glory, “out there”] external to oneself – like God’s appearing to Moses in the form of a burning bush.] (Lev. 9:6; Is. 6:1, 35:2) “In the **New** Testament, however, the emphasis shifts to *participation*... **We** are glorified together with Christ...”<sup>3</sup> The revelation of the divine nature of God, the glory of God, is found in **us** as we *participate* in Christ’s life, suffering, death, and resurrection; as we *participate* in the flow of his divine, incarnated, self-giving, costly love.

In the Book of Genesis, we are told that we were created in the image and likeness of God. (Gen. 1:26-27) What I think that means is that the core of our DNA is divine. That’s one reason Jesus calls his disciples “little children” – they, and we, are children of God, sharing the genetic makeup of Christ – each of us potentially “little Christs” (to use C.S. Lewis’ image). But we have *also* evolved from our *animal* ancestors, and we share *those* genes, also: genes that have helped them survive. Genes programmed for fight or flight; for self-preservation; and, in some cases, for violence and hierarchical domination. The question for us is: **Which** genes – divine or animalistic – end up getting expressed in our lives?

It’s like that story of the old Cherokee who told his grandson about the battle that goes on inside people. He said, “The battle is between two ‘wolves’ inside us all. One is Evil. It is anger, envy, jealousy, greed, arrogance, self-pity, lies, superiority, and ego. The other wolf is good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and

faith.” The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: “Which wolf wins?” The old Cherokee replied, “The one you feed.”

There is within each of us both divine and animalistic DNA. Which gets fed? Which gets manifested in our lives?

In today’s Gospel, the verse which is translated “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” can also be translated “I have loved you *in order that* you also love one another.”<sup>4</sup> Jesus’ *intent* in loving us is that we also love one another, forming a community of love that generates more love as we love one another, and another, and another. And, as we experience *Jesus’* love, *God’s* love, for **us**, that divine part of our DNA is awakened and outwardly expressed in love for one another; while the animalistic part of our DNA goes dormant.

In the last verse of today’s Gospel, Jesus tells us that everyone will know that we are his disciples if we have love for one another. As we will sing in our final hymn today, “They’ll know we are Christians by our love.”

But is that really how people *experience* Christians in our world today – as loving one another, just as Jesus has loved us?

Unfortunately, the answer is often, “no.” Mahatma Gandhi, a Hindu, famously said, “I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.” In a recent survey commissioned by the Episcopal Church, it was found that only 15% of people who belong to other religions said they viewed Christians overall as compassionate; and the number was even lower – 12% - among people who claim no religious affiliation. The survey revealed that non-Christians view Christians as hypocritical, judgmental, self-righteous, arrogant, unforgiving, and disrespectful.”<sup>5</sup> Christians are also increasingly seen as overly political, vindictive, anti-gay, anti-women, anti-immigrant, and anti-science.

If this perception of Christians by non-Christians is even partly true, it is time for us Christians to ask ourselves, “Which wolf are we feeding?”

The context of today’s Gospel is Jesus’ Last Supper with his disciples. Jesus’ love for his disciples is unwavering, even though he knows one disciple will shortly betray him and another deny him 3 times. His love is unwavering as he walks the way of the cross. *This* is what it means to be a Christian. *This* is the divine love Jesus wants to awaken in our genes. *This* is the glory in which he calls us to participate.

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

AMEN

- 1 <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=4607>
- 2 Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing, 1985, pp. 178-181)
- 3 Bromiley, *ibid.*, p. 180
- 4 Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *The Gospel According to John, XIII-XXI, The Anchor Bible, Vol. 29A*, New York: Doubleday, 1970, p. 607
- 5 <https://religionnews.com/2022/03/09/episcopal-bishop-curry-says-more-to-do-as-poll-shows-christians-seen-as-hypocrites/> see also <https://www.timesrecordnews.com/story/life/2022/03/26/episcopal-poll-americans-like-jesus-but-not-some-his-followers/7129125001/>