



"Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!"

Fifth Sunday of Easter
Saturday and Sunday, May 18–19, 2019

All Services

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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

John 13:31-35

Have you ever stood before a transitional moment in your life? A moment when everything you've ever known was about to

change? Stood before a crossroads unsure of what lay ahead? A graduation? The death of a loved one? The end of a relationship?

Because that is this moment for Jesus' friends. Everything they have ever known is about to change. Our gospel story for today takes place during what many biblical scholars call 'the Farewell Discourse.' In John's Gospel this is Jesus' last moments with his friends. I imagine tears in Jesus' eyes as he said: "Little children, I am only with you a little longer...Where I am going, you cannot come." I imagine Jesus was choosing his words carefully, as he prepared his friends for his departure, as he prepared them for his death. This is an emotional moment, far more emotional than the Gospel writer has described for us.

This moment is also sandwiched between two other major events. At the beginning of our story, Judas leaves Jesus and his friends to betray him. And what follows this moment is Peter's claims that he would never deny Jesus. So, I have to imagine that Jesus knew the weight of his words here; he had to speak something profound, something that would calm the anxious hearts of his beloved friends. Jesus speaks love into this transitional moment. Jesus speaks love here, even in the face of betrayal and denial.

This moment captures something about Jesus, especially the human Jesus. It tells us that Jesus understands human relationships; here, Jesus speaks to how hard love can be. Two of his friends are about to do and say terrible things: Judas is about to betray Jesus and Peter is about to deny knowing him. It can be incredibly hard to love in these circumstances, but love is what Jesus speaks and what Jesus does.

We've probably all had experiences that have boiled down to how hard love can be. We've met a few people who seem to be unlovable. I bet some faces are coming to mind right now...

Or think about the people we love who do unlovable things. I think of the many times I've treated my parents badly, disappointed them with some stupid action, and yet, they still seem to love me. Love is complicated and love can be hard sometimes. And Jesus shows us just how much he understands that.

The Greek language also knows how complicated and hard love can be so much so that it has five words for love. With these 5 words, Greek captures the complexity of love in ways our own English language struggles with. The Greek word for love in our story for today is agape. So, what's agape love? Agape is love that looks beyond itself; it is love that asks the question, "What's best for you?"

Martin Luther King, Jr. called agape "the highest form of love," "an overflowing love that seeks nothing in return."

So that's the love Jesus is talking about here. That's the love that Jesus has for his disciples; the love that Jesus has for us. This is the love that went to the cross, the love that opened his arms to the world.

Then, Jesus takes this love a step further; he invites us to be a part of this love. He says, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." In other words, "I have loved you, so you are able to love others." With these words, Jesus shows how love is a gift from God. A gift given to all of us and meant to be shared. We were never made to hold onto to God's love for us; we were always meant to share it.

Or perhaps think about it another way. This love commandment reframes something else we've heard about love before: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Sound familiar? Jesus is telling his friends – and now us! – "love your neighbor as I have loved you." Love your neighbor as I have loved you.

Jesus is setting the bar high! Jesus is calling us to choose love. Jesus is calling us to try loving those who might seem to be unlovable. And remember Jesus isn't speaking this love into a vacuum. Jesus is speaking this love to those that are about to betray and deny him. If anyone gets it, Jesus understands just how hard it is to choose love. Jesus knew what Judas and Peter would do, and he could have said something so different: "Judas, you're a traitor! How could I love you? And Peter, you're about to turn your back on me! How could I love you?" He could have spoken out of anger, called them names, treated them as badly as they would treat him. But he doesn't. Jesus chooses love.

So perhaps, the next time you want to speak to someone with anger, call someone names, or treat another person badly, stop yourself. Our world needs more love in it, people. As I look around and hear all the anger, hostility, and nastiness, I want to shout some love into this world. That is our call as followers of Jesus. Remember the love Jesus has for you. Remember Jesus' call to choose love.

And sure, the reality of the matter is we won't always choose love. We will mess up. Because the truth is, we all do unlovable, but God is loving. God will keep speaking love to us. No matter what. And Jesus will keep calling us to do better; he will keep calling us to choose love.

Because the only way our world will know God's love is if we keep speaking God's love into this world. Because God's love – Jesus Christ – is for the sake of this world. And thanks be to God for that! Amen.

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