

SERMON: 24 April 2016 - LOVE

(Reading: John 13: 30-35)

When I read this passage during the week, I could only say one word: WOW! Jesus was approaching his end on earth and despite this, He still had time to chat, teach, help and prepare his disciples for what was to come. And I mean on top of all this He had to face someone from His inner circle – some one that He trusted who was going to betray Him. I find this really WOW.

Our reading is telling us what happened after Judas left the room. I cannot imagine the tension in that room. But despite everything that has happened Jesus had a very direct message for them.

He is telling them to see the bigger picture – a picture beyond that upper room, a WOW picture. He is painting a picture in which God will be glorified by His obedience to God, by His willingness to sacrifice Himself for the redemption of humanity on the cross. When God revealed his glory to Moses in Exodus 33–34, his glory was “abounding in covenant love and covenant faithfulness” (Ex 34:6), which could also be translated “full of grace and truth.” Like Moses of old - the disciples will see God’s glory, now revealed in Jesus. As the Gospel unfolds, Jesus’ glory is revealed in his signs but especially in the cross, his ultimate act of love. The Jewish people were expecting God to reveal his glory in something like a cosmic spectacle of fireworks; but Jesus reveals the same side of God’s character that was emphasized to Moses: his covenant love!

So Jesus is telling His disciples that nothing has changed. God’s love for His children has not changed.

Then Jesus addresses His disciples in a very personal way as it was custom for teachers to speak to their disciples/followers. Teachers sometimes called their disciples “children” and disciples called teachers “my father.” Jewish literature also included “testaments” of dying or departing famous heroes of the past giving important teachings to their children, to be read by future generations. Because Jesus is leaving, it is natural for him to provide final instructions to his disciples.

Jesus is giving them a new commandment. But was it really new? The Old Testament had commanded love (Lev.19:18); what makes Jesus' commandment new is the new standard and example: "as I have loved you"—in the context, to the point of laying down one's life for others. He also adds that, if they do not follow this commandment to LOVE like He did, then they are not His disciples.

Again – WOW. I mean Jesus does not beat around the bush or mince His words. He is telling them and us exactly what He expects from His disciples.

And on this morning when we remember the last meal of Jesus Christ and His ultimate sacrifice on the cross – we are reminded of his direct words, His commandment to us all. WE need to LOVE like He did – thinking of others more than Himself, being a Servant to others – by glorifying God and not Himself.

If there ever was a test of God's love I think there would have been only two questions namely:

1. Do you give God the glory for everything that is happening in your life, career and relationships or do you happily sing along with ABBA "The winner takes it all", glorifying only yourself and competing nature?
2. Do you often "lay down" your life, your career, your time for God and others? Or do you just think of YOUR TIME, YOURSELF and your own family?

I wonder if you and I would pass the test. Let's be honest. We have failed God so many times on so many occasions. Yes we have to admit we receive communion not as VICTORS but REDEEMED sinners who are guilty of NOT GLORIFYING God through our LOVE. But God knows our hearts and He has given us the opportunity to frequently remember HIS love by celebrating the Last Supper. Again God comes to us, and reminds us of His glorious LOVE. We are here not because we are perfect. We are here because we need God. We need His Holy Spirit to help us to LOVE and forgive others. We need Jesus to heal the wounds of our sins, and others – often caused by us.

We need to love like children often do – practical and not with colourful words like the four year old child whose next door neighbour was an

elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife. Upon seeing the man cry, the little boy went into the old gentleman's garden, climbed onto his lap, and sat there. When his Mother asked what he had said to the neighbour, the little boy said, "Nothing.....I just helped him cry". Children often feel things that we do not see. Children have the ability to LOVE in practical ways that goes beyond imagination. They understand the WOW of glorious LOVE.

The same is true of a mother's love. It is a love that cannot be described. There is a Gaelic legend which tells the story of an eagle swooping down and carrying a little baby to its lofty nest. The strong men of the village tried to scale the high and rugged cliff, but each one failed. Then past them went a small, frail woman, climbing the sheer cliff and returning the baby to safety. "How did she do it?" the strong men asked in amazement. She told them her secret, "I am the baby's mother". Her love enabled her, frail as she was, to out-distance the strongest of men.

And this is what Glorious love can do.... We often want to see miracles. We are so nosy to figure out how God works in our lives. We are obsessed by understanding dreams and visions. Maybe the time has come to just do what Jesus commanded us to do: to LOVE like He did – to lay down our priorities for the sake of others, to love inclusively and unconditionally, to be practical and childlike. We do not have to figure out what God is going to do next – let us focus on how God's LOVE is transforming us.

So let us stand up from the table this morning and have the conviction to remind one another when we do not LOVE, that we have stopped being disciples of Jesus. WOW – what a challenge!

Amen