

“As I Have Loved You”

Message by DD Adams

Providence United Methodist Church

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The gospel lesson for today is taken from John, chapter 13, verses 31-35. I'll be reading from the New Revised Standard Version. “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.’” This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God.

Let’s pray. Loving God full of mercy and grace, open our ears, hearts, and minds this morning and touch each heart as we strive to become like you. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

Peace be with you! Today’s text communicates a radical love within a community that Christ forms—the Church. It’s a love command we obey and are able to express by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let me read verses 34 and 35 again. “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.” Our actions prove our love for one another. When we take this love into the world it becomes the most effective way to show others God’s love. They see the love we

have for each other, and they see the love we give to them. This love is Christ's self-less giving to the world we emulate.

Jesus said it's a new commandment. What makes it new is how Christ shows us what this Godly love does. This love loses and let's go of what the self wants. As Christ was willing to die for us by going to the cross, we're willing to die to self. Love is defined by the cross. Christ's volitional and substitutionary act of the giving of his life expresses the perfect qualities of God's love.

Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 state that we're to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our might. Jesus states it again in this gospel lesson, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just *as I have loved you*, you also should love one another." The only thing that's new in this commandment is ". . . as I have loved you." A question to ask ourselves is this—do we find our own way to define what love means and not Jesus'? More on that later.

On the back of the bulletin I've written about the context of these five verses. *Just before* these verses (Jn 13: 31-35) there's an interchange between Jesus and Judas at the Last Supper. Jesus just told the disciples who would betray him, but they didn't understand. Then *after the five verses* Jesus conveys to Peter that he'll deny him three times.

Knowing the depth of Judas and Peter's sin shows us the depth of God's love and willingness to forgive no matter what we've done or will do in the future. Jesus loved his own who were in the world and he loved them to the end—even when Judas sold him for a few pieces of silver and the others scattered and fled.

Think about God's unconditional kind of love—agape love. It's not a friendship love or a romantic or erotic love. It's not a kind of love that has to be reciprocated. Agape love is the highest kind of love and most self-sacrificing that there is. This type of love is the love that God has for his children.

It was displayed on the cross by Jesus Christ. In John 3:16 it's written that "God so loved (agapao) the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life." If a husband and father had a choice to have his family and his children die or for him to die and he chose to die for them, that's similar to "agape" love, but God's love is so much greater.

Agape love does good to you but doesn't base the giving on what's been given to them. It expects nothing in return. It's a kind of love that knows no boundaries or limits. When Jesus shared his final meal with close friends he knew what was on the horizon. These are his words, that we ". . . 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."

This is what sets us apart from those who don't know and love God. We don't return evil when evil is given. We don't seek revenge or find a way to return mean and bitter words. We forgive, and we continue to seek to forgive. We allow God to work forgiveness in us. We continually let go of hurt, and we seek unity and love within our congregation. The world didn't understand Jesus. Why would we expect the world to understand us?

The love of God is evangelistic. Jesus said when we love one another in the way he loves us this is how everyone will know that we're his disciples. This is a kind of love that embraces all people regardless of who they are and what they do or don't do. We're to love no matter what and that means we *welcome* them into our faith community. To love as Jesus does is to love inclusively and universally.

How do you show your love to others who are different from you? Think about the people Jesus sought out most frequently? Who was it? Roman soldiers, prostitutes, lepers, tax collectors, the sick and the mentally ill all the outcasts of society. I believe we're called to stretch our love. To give when it hurts, to send a card

when we'd rather not bother, to make a meal for someone who doesn't show appreciation, to give money to someone in need and then turns around and hurts you. Our love is to continue to grow and develop.

There's something about loving unconditionally that transforms us. We're willing to change. We want to change. Our self-absorption grows smaller and God's love grows larger in us. We focus on the good in others and show grace and mercy. Each of us here have seeds of failure embedded deep down inside of us. Seeds of falling short just like Judas and Peter. We all make many mistakes.

We know full well what it's like to betray and deny Jesus if we choose to remember when we did the same. When we treated someone in a way that wasn't with God's love. We can choose to be transformed as Peter was or we can give up as Judas. If we're genuinely in love with our Maker I believe we'll find grace and cry out to God and pursue God in a way that works for the betterment of others.

When we're faced with the choice of giving love when it's difficult, let's pray that God will breathe his loving Spirit into us and take away our bent to deny others God's love. Let's pray for God to stretch our love way beyond the limits we've set. Let's pray that God would finish and complete us as the new creation we're intended to become through loving and forgiving each other. In the words of Charles Wesley, ". . . till we take our place in heaven, till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise."

Let's pray. God of love, we're called to mediate your love to all people. Teach us to love each other and to love without any expectation of being loved in return. Help us to love others who aren't accustomed to being loved and suffer from hurts they can't seem to shake themselves from. Help us remember that when we forgive, we love. And when you we love, God pours more grace into our lives so we're able to be a blessing to others. Amen.