



northminster presbyterian church

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roswell, georgia 30076

6-May-2007 Easter 5

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 11:1-9 John 13:31-35

**SERMON:** For Love And Glory (Rev. Brent Anderson)

If you're at all like me, you probably listened to the gospel lesson and thought to yourself "Why, on this fifth Sunday of Easter, does the lectionary take us back to such an ominous night; the night when Jesus has his final meal with his disciples... the night when Jesus washes his disciple's feet... the night when Judas goes out to betray Jesus?" It seems strange. You would think that we would be focusing on "Happy Easter" texts! Texts that say, "Jesus is alive! He is risen!"

We want to see Jesus appear to the disciples in locked rooms. We want to see Jesus eating fish with his disciples along the seashore. We want Jesus to show us that he is alive... *to show us his hands, his feet, his side.*

But instead, we find Jesus preparing his disciples for his impending death and absence. He's talking to them like little children. He actually calls them that (in a loving way). "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.'"

*It's Easter! We don't want that! We want to see Jesus in his glory!*

And strangely enough, that is what we find in this text. In the midst of his betrayal and impending death, we see and hear the glory of Jesus.

We are given a mouthful of glory to read, "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." *What is that saying?*

Jesus has just told the disciples that he came not to be served, *but to serve*. He has just told his disciples that he has come from the Father and he will go to the Father. He has just told his disciples that one of them will betray him - the one to whom he will give the piece of bread that has been dipped in wine. He gives it to Judas and then he tells Judas to go quickly and do what he is about to do. And that's why, at the beginning of our text, we read that Judas leaves the room. He is going out to betray Jesus. And Jesus declares that on account of this chain of events being set in motion that he has been glorified and that God has been glorified in him.

Look at it this way. One of the most amazing things about Jesus (as presented in the scriptures) was not only did he know everything that was going to happen (he knew his future), not only did he tell others everything that was going to happen (though they didn't fully understand or believe it), *but he let it happen*. He remained faithful and focused on the purposes of God and the role that God had asked him to play in fulfilling those purposes. He never wavered, never gave in to temptation, he never shied away from self-giving and sacrifice; he was obedient, even unto death. And he did it all for *love and glory*. He did it out of love for God and love for humanity. He did it in order to give God glory. And in remaining obedient, in remaining faithful, God glorified him and was glorified in him.

Jesus wasn't seeking glory the way most of us would think of seeking glory. When we think of glory, we think about being the best, being the most successful. We think about being the MVP of the Superbowl or the winner on American Idolatry. We think about what we can get from glory; the cheers and admiration of others, the fame and the fortune. We want the book deal, the record deal, or the shoe named after us. We rarely think of seeking glory for someone else.

But Jesus sought glory through humble obedience, not glory for himself, *but glory for God*. He did what God wanted him to do. Through his obedience and faithfulness, he glorifies God and in return is glorified by God as one who brings God glory.

Sure, there are times when glory is thrust upon us, times when we don't seek it for ourselves. People do courageous things: they jump into raging waters to save someone who's drowning, they run into burning buildings to save children, they jump in front of trains to push people to safety. People do heroic things, and not necessarily for the benefits that come afterwards. But most of the time, people seek glory because they expect to get something out of it. We do it for the benefits.

And if we do seek glory for someone else, most of the time it's because there is something in it for us. It's for selfish reasons. The way of Jesus is far from us.

There's a certain irony in this text. This is not the time when you would expect Jesus to be aware of his glory or God's glory. Yet, this is where the text highlights that glory. God is being glorified in his hour of darkness. Because in his betrayal, suffering and death, Jesus demonstrates his utmost loyalty to God; *his utmost love and commitment to God*.

And it is here that Jesus demonstrates his utmost love and commitment to his disciples as well. Jesus, knowing what is about to happen, knowing that one of his own is going to betray him, takes off his outer robe, wraps a towel around himself and washes the feet of his disciples; an act of love, an act of service, an act of humility.

And then Jesus says "Go and do likewise." And moments later he says, "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."

That's not as easy at it first sounds. That's pretty bold. That's pretty hard. First of all, notice that Jesus commands his disciples to love one another. It's not a suggestion. He doesn't say try to love one another. And he doesn't say to make it your goal to love one another. He *commands* his disciples to love one another.

And it's not just *any* love. He doesn't just say, "love one another" and then leave it at that. He says "love one another just as I have loved you."

You can just imagine the disciples looking around the room at each other and thinking to themselves, "Is he serious? Look at us. We can't do that." That's setting the bar too high. I'm sure one of them probably wanted to speak up and say, "Umm... Jesus, why do we need this 'new' commandment? Why can't we just go back to what you said before... you know 'Love your neighbor as yourself?' We liked that one. Love our neighbors as ourselves. We can do that. But to love each other the way you love us?' Are you really saying that your way of loving, your way of serving, your way of treating others needs to be the standard by which we love one another?!"

That's what makes this a "*new*" commandment. It's not a generic love. It's not an emotional or romantic kind of love that he commands. It's a love rooted in action. It's not a love that depends on our emotions, our experience, or our feelings about ourselves. *Where is God in that?*

Jesus' life sets the pattern for this kind of love. It's a love that doesn't calculate the cost. It's a love without reserve. It's a love that is truthful; a love that is constant; a love that is willing to give; a love willing to serve.

*And very quickly we realize that Jesus' love is very different from our own.*

When we think about love, our first inclination is to think about a romantic kind of love - the love between two lovers, the love of poets and silver screen kisses. And that shades the way we think about the love that Jesus commands. The love that Jesus commands has less to do with feelings and emotions than it has to do with our actions; with acts of dedication and commitment and service.

When we think about love, our second inclination is to think about love the same way we think about glory. We tend to think of love in selfish terms; of what we hope to get out of it. We want to feel loved. We want to experience love. So we give love in order to get love. But Jesus' love is different.

Jesus' love is closer to the love we give as parents. You think about all the sacrifices that parents make for their children; the way they are asked to give without expecting much in return: the sleepless hours, the dirty diapers, the hard lessons taught, the constant protection and vigilance. A parent's love is a self-giving kind of love; not a giving-up of one's life, but a *giving-away* of one's life. It's a Jesus kind-of-love.

"Love one another as I have loved you." Jesus is saying that his way of loving, his way of serving, his way of treating others needs to be the standard by which we love one another! Jesus' life *AND* death helps illustrate or define this kind of love.

Perhaps that is why this is an Easter text. It's only after Easter, only after his death and resurrection, that we can fully understand the depth of his self-giving; the depth of the love that Jesus is talking about. It's a God-sized love. Jesus is talking about a love that is willing to suffer and die. Jesus is talking about a love that is willing to be broken... willing to be poured out for others.

*"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

This way of living; this way of loving is meant to be our way of life; our way of living together in community. Jesus commands his disciples to love one another and to let this love be seen throughout the world. People are supposed to be able to look at this group of disciples and notice something different; notice in them this rare quality that brings and keeps them together. Jesus wants love to be the identifying mark of his followers.

Jesus wants people to be able to look at the church... to be able to look at you and the way you live and "*know*" that you are one of his disciples. When we love the way that Jesus did, we show people that we are Christ's disciples and we draw people to Christ. When we love each other, people see Christ in us and hopefully are drawn to experience God's love too.

This "Jesus kind-of-love" might seem impossible. But the underlying assumption of this scripture is expressed in Jesus' command "Love one another just as I have loved you." We can do this because he first loved us. We can do this because we are loved. We don't need to magically conjure up this kind of love, we simply need to act on it. We have it because we have experienced it.

God loves you. That's why God has called you here to this place. God loves you. And wants you to be a part of this 'loving' community. God loves you. That's why God has set a place for you at this table; *the table of his love*.

God loves you. And God asks you to love others with a God kind-of-love; a love that is patient, a love that is kind, a love that is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. A love that does not insist on its own way; a love that is not irritable or resentful; a love that does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. A love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. *Let us be a church that lives together with a God kind-of-love! Amen.*

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#### **Acts 11:1-9**

1Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. 2So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, 3saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" 4Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, 5"I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. 6As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. 7I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' 8But I replied, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' 9But a second time the voice answered from heaven, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.'

#### **John 13:31-35**

31When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33Little 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.' 34I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

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