

Sermon
April 24, 2016
Text: John 13: 31-35
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One day a few weeks ago, I was talking with a young woman who is struggling with decisions about what she will do with her life. Will she go back to school, will she choose to live with her mom again when she really wants to be on her own? What will she do about money? There are conflicts with one of her sisters? Dealing with her mom's new husband has been hard for her? Somewhere in that conversation, I realized a love for her that makes me want to continue to listen, to simply be present. I don't know how I can give her support, but I want her to feel that she is not alone. I want to know how her life works out.

On Thursday, three from our congregation – Dave, Roger, and I were at a prayer vigil for Joervis Scruggs the 15 year old youth shot in the back by police as he was running from a stolen car. As we stood at the place he was shot, a woman was reading a letter from Syreeta Myers, the mother of Vonderritt Myers who who shot by police in our community. It was a letter written to the parents of this 15 year who had been killed. They were now a part of this awful club of parents whose children have been shot and killed. Listening to her words while looking at the picture of this child who is no more – I felt such love that my heart ached.

Two weeks ago in Seattle, I was talking with a young Israeli man, who was tearfully grieving, as he put it, “what my people continue to do” He desperately wanted peace between Israeli and Palestinian people, and grieved that though so many Israelis and

Palestinians want the conflict to end, the dehumanizing and conflict continue. He's 25 and was in the Compassionate Listening workshop because he wants to bring healing. As he told me his story, I felt such love for him.

Laurie and I sat by the water in Seattle talking about our lives. I remember when I first met her in a beginning compassionate listening workshop in 2012. I was placed in a small group with her to talk about our lives. What we discovered was she an avowed atheist and me a Christian minister. And what we share is passion for justice and love of the people of the earth. We are in constant contact and now sitting with her by the water talking about our lives, I realize I love her and she loves me.

Does love ever take you by surprise? You find yourself loving someone that you would not have imagined loving? Or you realize that you are loved when you don't feel worthy of such a love?

I can only imagine that Jesus' disciples were surprised by love. Surprised by his love for them - Surprised by their love for him - Surprised by their love for each other - Surprised by their love for those Jesus invited into their midst.

Today's reading from the Gospel of John is one of those that is so familiar we have a hard time hearing it, because we think we know what it says. We are so drawn to the "new commandment – that you love one another" part that we can miss the earlier connections entirely.

This is very end of the chapter in which Jesus gathers with his disciples for the Passover feast. In the very first verse of the chapter, the gospel-writer John says: "Having loved

his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” Then during supper he got up from the table and began to wash his disciples feet. And it was in that time that he told them that one of them would betray him. Judas goes out to betray him.

It is at that point, just when Judas has gone, that Jesus says now the Human One has been glorified and God has been glorified in him. The word glorify is used 5 times in two sentences! It is in talking about glorifying God that Jesus proclaims the commandment to love one another! That we must love each other just as Jesus has loved us. It is through our love that we are recognizable as Jesus disciples. It is through our love for one another that we glorify God.

We don't tend to use glorify language much any more and when we do, it has been used, usurped into a kind of fuzzy praise word. But what is it to glorify? To glorify is to honor, to do something that brings honor, to magnify who God is. It is to do that which honors God.

We think immediately of Micah 6 in which God has a controversy with the people. God is saying do you not remember what I have done – I don't want your burnt offerings, your thousands of rams, your rivers of oil. What God wants – what honors, give glory to God is to justice, to love kindness, to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:6-8)

Mary's Magnificat says “My soul magnifies the Lord” - She magnifies God, by taking God into herself and giving something for the life of the world even at her personal risk.

The context in which we most often hear glory or glorify used in our society is when someone does successfully and says “I give God the glory.” An appropriate question is

“What gives God glory?” Does just anything we do give glory to or honor God – simply because we give God a footnote? I can appreciate a football player who has faith in God, yet does making a touchdown or winning a football (or game of any other sport) honor God?

If I apply the gospel to it, then I would have to say, “No, my sports successes, or business successes, or awards and medals do not automatically honor God.” The active question is - is it about who God is and what God call us to be and do in the world – which is to love God’s people and Love God’s earth? If it is – then it honors God.

When you care for someone who is hurting, or for someone who needs to be lifted up, your act of love honors God!

When you step outside what is easy, and you protect and stand up for someone who is being dismissed and bullied, your act of love glorifies God!

When you restrain your desire for revenge and you reach out in reconciling love and forgiveness, you glorify God!

When you commit yourself to learn to respond in love in situations that are hard for you, you glorify God!

David Lose reminds us that the love Jesus is talking about “isn’t romantic love, nor is it simply being nice, nor is it only loving those who love you back. Think about it: when Jesus washed his disciples’ feet, Judas was there. Further, he will now demonstrate just how much God loves the world by dying for those who manifestly do not love him. Love

is hard because it is self-sacrificing. It means putting the good of the other first, even when it hurts.

Lose says that he “finds it striking that these are the words Jesus’ leaves with his disciples. I mean, he could have said, “Go out and die with me.” Or, “keep the faith.” Or, “when I am gone go out and teach and preach to all the world.” Or, well, any number of things. But instead he offered this simple and challenging word, “love another.” Why? Because this kind of love is the hallmark not just of God and Jesus but also of the Christian church. As in the old camp song, Jesus agrees that the whole world will know we are Christians not by our sermons or our sacraments or our festivals or our buildings or our crosses or our family values (*or our footnoting God for our wins and successes*) - but by our love. They will know we are Christians by our love. It’s just that important.”

When we sing: Glory and gratitude and praise – these we offer to God – We are saying that we offer our lives to love in a way that honor God who is Love. We do not love perfectly – by any stretch. Yet our task is to continually allow God to bring us back to love.