

Fifth Sunday of Easter reflection

Welcome to our online reflections.

I'm the Reverend Carla Vicencio Prior, Team Vicar of the Wirksworth Team Ministry, and whether you are a regular to these reflections or you are with us for the first time, you are very welcome.

We begin with a prayer for this Sunday, followed by a reflection and a time of prayer.

The lectionary reading for today is Jesus giving his disciples a new commandment, that they should love one another as he has loved them and it comes from John 13:31-35. You may want to take your time to read this in advance of listening to the reflection.

Collect

Risen Christ,
your wounds declare your love for the world and the wonder of your risen life: give us compassion and courage to risk ourselves for those we serve, to the glory of God the Father. Amen

Scripture reading: John 13:31-35

The New Commandment

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

Reflection

As is the case with many lectionary texts, something is lost when this passage is not read in its literary context. The context of this passage, of course, is John’s account of Jesus’ last supper with his disciples.

In this account, we hear that about many things that Jesus knows, and about how he responds to the knowledge that he has. I’m going to give you 4 examples of this. Before I highlight how Jesus responds to each situation, I’d like you to think what your response might be in the same circumstance. This isn’t a blame or guilt or self-congratulatory game, it’s just a way of doing some personal reflection (or even theological reflection – looking at scripture and seeing how it is impact your life and choices). So here we go:

1. Jesus knows that his hour has come to depart from this world and go to his Father (John 13:1a). How does he respond?

- a. “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (13:1b).
2. He knows that the Father has given all things into his hands, and that he has come from God and is going to God (13:3). How does he respond?
- a. He gets up from the table and takes on the role of a slave, washing his disciples’ dusty, dirty feet.
3. Jesus also knows who is about to betray him (John 13:11), and he is very troubled by this knowledge (13:21). How does he respond?
- a. He announces the imminent betrayal to his disciples, and then proceeds to feed the betrayer: “So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot” (13:26). Judas then leaves to do his dirty work, and the narrator adds, “and it was night” (13:30).

It is at this dark moment that our text begins:

4. “When he (Judas) had gone out, Jesus said... ”
 - a. We might expect a speech about how evil Judas is and how awful the consequences of his actions will be for him. But Jesus instead focuses on his mission and

preparing his disciples for what is to come. He speaks of being glorified and of glorifying God (John 13:31-32), which in Johannine language is a reference to his elevation on a cross (3:14; 12:23-28). Then he tells his disciples in tender words (“little children”) that he will be with them only a little longer, and that where he is going, they cannot come (13:33).

This conversation continues after our lectionary text, with Peter asking, “Lord, where are you going?” and Jesus responding, “Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward” (John 13:36). Peter responds, “Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you” (13:37), to which Jesus responds by predicting Peter’s denial of him (13:38).

Yes, Jesus also knows that Peter, one of his closest companions, will deny him. Yet his parting words to his disciples focus not on blame for their past and future failures, but rather on preparing them for what is to come, promising that although he will no longer be physically present with them, they will not be abandoned.

In the coming chapters Jesus will talk about the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate who will teach and advise and comfort them. Now he focuses on the need for his

disciples to live in community, to love one another as he has loved them (John 13:34).

All that Jesus has taught and shown them demonstrates that loving one another as Jesus has loved is a spectrum! It encompasses the mundane; it means serving one another, even in the most menial tasks and on the other hand, this love encompasses heroic acts of great risk; it extends even to the point of giving one's life for another. And every kind of self-giving love in between.

Here in chapter 13, Jesus demonstrates his love for the same disciples who will fail him miserably. Jesus washes and feeds Judas who will betray him, Peter who will deny him, and all the rest who will fail to stand by him in his hour of greatest distress. The love that Jesus demonstrates is certainly not based on the merit of the recipients, and Jesus commands his disciples to love others in the same way.

I've spoken before about why it is hard to love those who are difficult. Basically, because all human love is self-serving – we love so that we can be loved back. But that is not what Jesus demonstrated. But it is our human need to want “recompense” for our acts of love, that makes it hard for us to love those whom we don't consider worthy, for whatever reason. We know that we continually fallen far short in our love for one another. So often, those in need of compassion find judgment instead.

But Jesus could not be clearer: It is not by our theological correctness, not by our moral purity, not by our impressive knowledge that everyone will know that we are his disciples. It is quite simply by our loving acts—acts of service and sacrifice, acts that point to the love of God for the world made known in Jesus Christ.

So whenever you demonstrate any act of love towards another, please think of it as doing it for Christ. It will connect you to God in a way that you may not have experienced before, and it may just give you the strength necessary to carry on doing that, even when it feels thankless or just too hard.

So go forth and love fearlessly, selflessly and in joy. Because when you do, you are indeed good news. Amen

Prayer

Eternal God,
whose Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life:
grant us to walk in his way,
to rejoice in his truth,
and to share his risen life;
who is alive and reigns, now and for ever.

Blessing

May the Lord bless you, and preserve you from all evil,
confirm and strengthen you in the faith and keep you in
eternal life. Amen