

“In a Nutshell . . . Love”

I heard of a Passion play performed at a church that included Jesus' appearances to his disciples after his resurrection and ended with his ascension into heaven. The climax of the play was to occur as Jesus gave the Great Commission to his disciples and then was lifted into the heavens, or in this case--the rafters, from a pulley system hidden behind his garment. Jesus said his last lines with great authority and began to ascend towards the ceiling. After Jesus had been raised about eight feet in the air the stagehand accidentally dropped Jesus five feet down because of difficulty with the rope. Jesus dangled in plain view of the audience and in the midst of some very startled disciples circling his feet. As he swung above their heads, Jesus improvised “Oh yeah, one more thing. ‘Love one another.’” Jesus was then yanked into the heavens by a very embarrassed stagehand.

The actor's improvisation nailed Jesus' teachings.

We've been celebrating Jesus' resurrection for the last four Sundays of Easter so it might seem a little awkward that in today's scripture we travel back in the story of Jesus to before his crucifixion. Jesus knows he will soon be leaving so he gives departing instructions to prepare the disciples to continue his mission without him being physically present.

Glory was this day's topic. Jesus could have entitled his teaching, “Glory: Comparing the Perspectives of Jesus the Christ and the World.” Wouldn't it be easier to understand if Jesus had used bullet points?

WORLD'S GLORY – gained from being world renown, exalted, prominent in society, and/or accomplishing a great feat.

WORLD'S GLORY Results in: larger than life bronze replicas outside sports arenas, 20 million dollar movie contracts, glitzy magazine covers and numerous talk show interviews.

Famous quote of WORLD'S GLORY - “For what is glory but the praise of fame?” The poet Milton.

End goal of WORLD'S GLORY – distinction, being world renown.

CHRIST'S GLORY – gained from humbling, sacrificial service to others.

CHRIST'S GLORY Results in: death upon a cross.

Famous quote of CHRIST'S GLORY - "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Jesus Christ, John's Gospel, the 12th chapter.

End goal of CHRIST'S GLORY – to radically transform the meaning of glory.

Christ's glory is not the kind of glory the world has in mind and it is difficult for even his disciples to grasp.

How can people even begin to understand that giving one's life in service to another is glory? Society back then, as now, stubbornly defines glory as honor, praise, renown. We cannot verbally argue people into a different understanding of glory. It didn't work in Jesus' time nor does it work now. That is why Christ instructs the disciples: *"love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."*

This is the one thing, perhaps the one and only thing, Jesus wants his disciples to know and remember when he is gone: love one another. Not "Keep the faith." Not "Listen for my voice." Not "Give more money to the church." Not "Resist temptation." Not "Make me proud." Not any of the other things we hear lifted up as priority in living a Christian life but this: "Love one another."

Jesus' new commandment is more a profound plea and hope that the disciples will ABIDE in his kind of love than a legal command. Jesus spoke elsewhere about loving one's enemies. By giving this command to his disciples, Jesus teaches "love one another" is to be the practice within their community of faith. They are to love one another within the church.

Three simple words, "love one another", that are the most difficult command Jesus could have given. They are simple because most of the time, on most days, we know what would be the most loving thing to do for those around us. Yet doing it is another matter. So many things get in the way – we are too busy, or tired, or fearful of being taken advantage of or angry or impatient or . . . YET

Jesus is adamant. To be a disciple is to love one another. Love is to be our distinguishing characteristic. Others will recognize us as Christ's disciples by our love.

How do we distinguish ourselves by love? By sharing the love we have received from Jesus Christ with others. We CAN do this.

We can do this because we have the Holy Spirit to help us, to love through us and prompt us to love if that is not our first inclination.

“Love one another.” I know you can do this because I have seen this congregation love one another in many ways.

I have seen you “love one another”:

--as four women gather around Denise Taylor to share their concern and hear the latest update on Katie’s progress.

--as meals were taken to the Taylor’s while Katie was in the hospital and now shared as they gather around their table at home for meals together. (thanks be to God!)

--as a Spiritual Caregiver visited a member.

--as Prayer Chain members prayed for a member who had lost a loved one.

--as Nadia and members painted the CE classrooms so our children would have a clean, fresh space in which to learn about Jesus’ love for them.

This congregation does love one another--a dramatic, persistent love like the love Jesus has for each one of us. Loving others is something you are already doing. When and where have you seen love in action within this congregation?

In just a few moments we will gather at the Lord’s Table. As we ponder ways to “love one another” let us also remember we are the objects of Jesus’ affection. He began his commandment with a declaration, “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. Just as I have loved you.”

Amen.