

Year C Easter 5 John 13 31 to 35

When Scripture is taken out of context, it can be difficult to understand and easy to misunderstand. This Gospel reading is certainly no exception. It is very important to know that this is the evening of Jesus' last supper with his disciples and Judas has just walked out the door to go to the authorities, to lead them to the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Jesus, betraying his friend and teacher.

We have gone back in time in John's Gospel, reliving the events leading up to Jesus' death. This backtracking started last Sunday and will continue over the next couple of weeks until Pentecost. It may seem strange to start reliving these events so soon after Easter but there is a purpose. We are not journeying to the cross this time. We are journeying toward the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus will be physically gone but will be present to us in the presence of the Holy Spirit – our guide, our teacher, our way in which we bring Jesus to the world. We show Jesus to the world through love. We hear this today, we've been hearing it, we will hear it again.

"As I have loved you," Jesus says, "as I have loved you that is how you must love one another." This love is the agape I have mentioned a few times recently. Agape is the pure, selfless, perfect love that comes from God. This is the love Jesus asks us to share with one another.

We know this and we understand the nature and depth of this love when we know and understand the context of today's story. Judas has just left the room. What an unpleasant feeling it is to know that, after you have left a room, you were spoken of poorly. It's happened to me. I'm sure it's happened to many others. Jesus shows us today that we are not to be that way. Judas has just left

the room. Jesus' betrayer has just left the room and how does Jesus respond? Well, we may have thought Jesus would then tell his disciples about how evil Judas is, how Judas has been corrupted by the world, how bad the consequences of this betrayal will be. It seems like this would be a great example for Jesus to point out to his other disciples about what happens when you do not follow his teachings. But he doesn't do this. And, really, we should know that he would not. After all, Jesus knew Judas was the one to betray him, to catapult him towards his death on the cross, and yet Jesus got down on his knees and washed Judas' feet. Jesus loved him, served him, welcomed him to his table while knowing how events were going to proceed.

And so, Judas leaves the room and Jesus focuses on his mission and on preparing his disciples for what is to come. Jesus speaks of glorifying God and of being glorified which is John's way of referring to Jesus' elevation on the cross. Jesus speaks tenderly to his disciples – calling them “little children” – and telling them he will be with them for only a while longer yet he will not abandon them.

He knows that Peter, one of his closest companions, will deny him. He knows that most of his disciples will flee the cross, afraid for their own lives but he will not abandon them. As we head toward Pentecost, we will hear Jesus telling his disciples about the Paraclete, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit who will be their comfort and companion, their help and their guide in his bodily absence.

As Jesus approaches his death, his focus is on earnestly instructing the disciples on how to go on living without him physically with them. He stresses the need for them to live in community – loving each other. “I give you a new commandment,” he says, “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." Jesus tells us he has given us the example of what this love looks like – serving, including, welcoming, not judging...this is the agape of God and such a love does not have human origins. The presence of the Holy Spirit is one big way in which we not only experience this love of God for us but are also able to share this love with others.

Jesus' sole concern, knowing his life, as it was then, was ending, was to create a community living in God's love. This was his purpose: it was and is God's only purpose – to reconcile all of creation to each other and to him through the love of Christ in perfect display in his life and in his death. As the New Jerusalem descends to earth in the Book of Revelation, it is a city representing the coming perfection of God's kingdom on earth as in heaven. The voice from the throne booms, "See, I am making all things new." This newness, though it may seem difficult to believe, comes through *us* as well as the other ways in which God is working in the world.

We are part of this coming newness, becoming new creations through our baptisms, clothed with Christ, anointed with the Holy Spirit. We are the community Jesus so earnestly desired for his disciples. Gathered by the Holy Spirit, led by the Holy Spirit, taught to love, enabled to love as God loves by the Holy Spirit.

A man named Jim Castle boarded an airplane in Cincinnati one night back in 1981. He recalls that as more passengers entered, the plane hummed with conversation, mixed with the sound of bags being stowed. Then, suddenly, people fell silent. The quiet moved slowly up the aisle like an invisible wake behind a

boat. Jim craned his head to see what was happening, and his mouth dropped open. Walking up the aisle were two nuns clad in simple white habits bordered in blue. He recognized the familiar face of one at once – the wrinkled skin, the eyes warmly intent. This was a face he'd seen in newscasts and on the cover of *Time*. The two nuns halted, and Jim realized that his seat companion was going to be Mother Teresa. Jim tells everyone who will listen that this short flight he experienced with his unexpected seat companion made a huge impact on his life. He discovered with shock that the small bag Mother Teresa carried with her onto the plane was her *only* bag – it held everything she owned. It inspired him to make an effort to simplify his own life. “I try to remember what really counts,” he says. “Not money or titles or possessions, but the way we love others.”

Not many of us will ever be called to live a life of service exactly like that of Mother Teresa – owning nothing except what will fit into one small bag, traveling the world over to live among the poor on each continent. But, we are all called to love as Mother Teresa loved – knowing and sharing the agape of God. Loving one another as Jesus loves us. There is a saying that “Love hurts” but Mother Teresa has a better saying: “I have found the paradox that if I love until it hurts, then there is no hurt, but only more love.” (Story found in *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Stories of Faith, 101 Best Stories*, pp.163-165).

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples.”