

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
May 19, 2019

One Journey Can Change Your Life: The Journey Exposes You for What You Are

John 13:31-35

³¹ When he [Judas] was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

³³ "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."



These are some of the knives that Wayne Boldt used to carve the Trinity Café mantelpiece. They are dangerous because they are so sharp. They can easily cut you. But without sharp knives like this, Wayne could never have made something so beautiful as this mantelpiece or our church cross.



That's the picture that comes to my mind as we hear our gospel lesson for today. Jesus said something that is sharp and cutting. Yet, these same words have been used by our Savior to shape his Church into his own masterpiece.

What did Jesus say? "As I have loved you, so you also must love one another"?

What did he say? "As I have loved you, so you also must put up with one another"?

What did he say? "As I have loved you, so you also must pretend to love one another"?

All of these would be hard enough. It is hard to like classmates that pick on you. It is hard to put up with family members who do the same, dumb, annoying things over and over. It is hard to put on the happy face, especially here at church or in a family gathering, and pretend to love one another, when in reality you don't ever want to see that person again.

All of that is already hard enough. But those commands would be as dull as a table knife. They don't cut like what Jesus actually said: "As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

The more we walk beside Jesus, the more we see what love really means. He loved his enemies. He loved his friends who disappointed him. He loved us enough to die for us.

You really don't need any other passage than this to be exposed as a sinner. "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." It cuts us open like a sharp knife and reveals the sin and guilt underneath. None of us love like Jesus loved us.

But we jumped into this journey while Jesus was in mid-stride. Let's reverse the picture a little bit and see what led up to this.

In John 13, Jesus is in the upper room, celebrating the Passover with his disciples one last time. He washes their feet, leaving them an example of humble service. Then he reclines at the table again for the meal and announces that one of them will betray him. Finally, he reveals to Judas that he knows that he is the betrayer. "What you are about to do, do quickly," Jesus commands him. Judas hurried out. Jesus knew that the betrayal and the suffering had been set in motion.

That's when our lesson begins.

³¹ When he [Judas] was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

When is Jesus glorified? When Jesus crushes all his enemies on the last day? Yes, but Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified."

When is Jesus glorified? When Jesus raises the dead on the last day? Yes, but Jesus said, "Now."

When is Jesus glorified? Jesus said, "God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him **at once.**"

"At once"? What is about to happen? Jesus is about to die for sinners who failed to love.

The Son of Man is glorified when he dies for sinners!

The closer we walk with Jesus, the more we see that we don't measure up to Jesus' love. The more we are cut by that sharp law, "As I have loved you, you must love one another." But the more that law cuts us, the more the Son of Man is glorified. He is glorified when we see that we are utterly unworthy of his love and see his amazing grace! He died for me!



With that truth, we begin to see this sharp knife not simply as a dangerous weapon that can cut us, we begin to see this passage as the sharp knife of a gifted carver. Perhaps you have heard too that a carver looks at a block of wood or some other material, and he sees the beautiful carving in that block of wood and simply begins to cut off the unneeded wood.¹

The artist sees what you can't. Gradually he cuts away and cuts away until you see the beauty that he had seen from the beginning.

“As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

We apply this law to ourselves, and God cuts away the pride in our hearts. He cuts away the judgmentalism. He cuts away nasty remarks and the claims of “righteous anger.”

But then what does he reveal? A saint? Someone who is holy and



perfect in his sight.

Think of 1 John 1:8-9: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” Why do we have confession of sins and announcement of forgiveness? So that we can see Jesus’ glory at work in us. He has purified us from all our sins. You are exposed as a saint – perfectly forgiven!

That’s why God invites us to go back to our baptism every day. There we see our beauty as Jesus sees it. “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:25-27).

¹ Watch a time lapse of this carving here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmtkIxz-0Iw>

That's why we have communion so regularly. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). What is that covenant? Read over Jeremiah 31:33-34 over and over again to make it your own.

³³ "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD.

"I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God,
and they will be my people.

³⁴ No longer will they teach their neighbor,
or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,"
declares the LORD.

"For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more."

It is in Word and Sacrament that you see what it means "As I have loved you." Jesus looks at you and sees you as a saint. Jesus forgives you. That makes you a saint.

But you are a saint in another sense. A saint is also a person who is set up apart for holy purposes.

What is that holy purpose? "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Our holy purpose is to show love so that the Savior's love is exposed through us.

This is truly the foundation of the Christian church. What made the Christian church grow in the first couple of centuries? Was it that they were super evangelists? I don't think so. Instead it was the refrain, "See how they love one another."

Let me read a portion of a blog:

At no other time in the history of Christianity did love so characterize the entire church as it did in the first three centuries. And Roman society took note. Tertullian reported that the Romans would exclaim, "See how they love one another!"

Justin Martyr sketched Christian love this way: "We who used to value the acquisition of wealth and possessions more than anything else now bring what we have into a common fund and share it with anyone who needs it. We used to hate and destroy one another and refused to associate with people of another race or country. Now, because of Christ, we live together with such people and pray for our enemies."

Clement, describing the person who has come to know God, wrote, "He impoverishes himself out of love, so that he is certain he may never overlook a brother in need,

especially if he knows he can bear poverty better than his brother. He likewise considers the pain of another as his own pain. And if he suffers any hardship because of having given out of his own poverty, he does not complain.”

When a devastating plague swept across the ancient world in the third century, Christians were the only ones who cared for the sick, which they did at the risk of contracting the plague themselves. Meanwhile, pagans were throwing infected members of their own families into the streets even before they died, in order to protect themselves from the disease.²

Brothers and sisters, can you make yourselves into this kind of masterpiece of love? The answer is “No!” But what you cannot do, our God can do.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that it is the Spirit who works a miraculous change in us: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).

How do become more loving? Walk closer to the Savior! Let his self-sacrificing love convict you and then empower you. Confess your sins and believe the absolution – not just to see yourself as a saint but through that Word let the Spirit make you into a saint who loves. Go back to your baptism, not only to claim the promise of forgiveness, but to claim the promise of the Spirit. Acts 2:38 says, “And you will receive the promised Holy Spirit.” Let the Holy Spirit create you to be the saint God is calling you to be. That is why we receive the Lord’s Supper. Not just to claim my status as saint, but to let the Holy Spirit work the new covenant in me: “Then they will all acknowledge me from the least of them to the greatest” (Jeremiah 31:34).

The world around us is becoming less and less Christian. Do we need to teach you all the exact words to say? No! People need to see the masterpiece that God has made you to be. They need to see us love.

This is the “new commandment.” It isn’t that God never said in the Old Testament to love another. It is a “new commandment” because he has to make us new to begin to do it.

I haven’t mentioned the middle portion of our text yet: ³³ *“My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.”*

Jesus could leave because his work would be done. He is glorified in his death for us.

Now he leaves us behind as his masterpiece, so that others can see him through us. Our work isn’t done yet.

² <https://earlychurch.com/unconditional-love.php>

So, Lord Jesus, cut and carve away. Cut away my sin. Reveal to me my lack of true love. Convict. Condemn. The more convicted, the more amazed I am at your perfect love and forgiveness.

Then, Lord Jesus, by cutting and carving away, you reveal your amazing power to change me. I know that when my work is done, I will follow you. Amen.

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My Next Steps on the Journey

- **Glorify the Son of Man:** Consider your relationships within your family, at work or school, among your friends. When have you been guilty of “putting up with” or “pretending to love”? Confess your sins and claim Jesus’ forgiving love. Read 1 John 1:8-9.
- **Make the Son of Man Known:** Memorize the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. How can you make daily use of God’s Word so that the Spirit might create this fruit within you?

GroupWork

1. Share highs and lows with the group and pray for each other.
2. “Everyone will know you are my disciples if you love one another” (John 13:34). Share an example of Christian love in action that made a lasting impression on you.
3. The love of David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel 20 stands out as an example of self-sacrificing love that glorifies the Son of Man. Read 1 Samuel 20 and answer these questions.
 - a. How does this account convict you?
 - b. How does this account comfort you?
 - c. What does this account teach you about showing love in your life?
 - d. What does this account make you want to pray about?
4. What does St. Paul’s/The Bridge do to put Jesus’ command “to love one another as I have loved you” into practice? What other ideas does your group have? What could your group do to show love to each other and to others? Send noteworthy ideas to Pastor Pete at ppanitzke@stpaulmuskego.org.
5. Close by praying or singing *Christian Worship* 491 vv. 1,4

O Master of the loving heart, the friend of all in need,
We pray that we may be like you In thought and word and deed.

Oh, grant us hearts like yours, dear Lord, So joyous, free, and true,
That all your children, ev’rywhere, Be drawn by us to you. Amen.