

John 13:31-35  
May 15, 2022

**GOSPEL READING: John 13:31-35**

*After washing the disciples' feet, predicting his betrayal, and then revealing his betrayer, Jesus speaks of his glorification on the cross. This deep complicated love of Jesus, even to death on the cross, will be the distinctive mark of Jesus' community.*

The holy gospel according to John.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

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

The gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

It seems everywhere you travel anymore, there is a roundabout. Even West Branch will soon have its own. Roundabouts seem to be the solution to traffic flow issues. When I think of roundabouts, I still have an image of one of my favorite comedic actors, Chevy Chase, in his role as Clark Griswold in the series of "Vacation" movies. Specifically, I am thinking of "European Vacation." Clark and his family are driving through London when he gets caught in a roundabout. Literally, caught as he goes round and round and round the result of heavy traffic and his inability to exit the roundabout. Time after time, as he rounds a corner, you hear him say, "Look kids, Big Ben." As a passenger in that car, I can imagine my head becoming a bit woozy the third or fourth time around.

The gospel of John at times has a way of making one's head spin. Take our opening two verses. John uses glorify/glorified five times. As John is prone to do throughout his gospel, repetition such as this, almost seems to spin out of control. Instead of emphasizing a significant theme in the story, John has his reader banging their head against a wall.

Perhaps, the challenge with understanding the text might be our understanding of the term "glorify." My mind sees "glorify" but it often hears "glory." A quick internet search of "glory" prompts as the first definition, "High renown or honor won by notable achievements." My mind

moves almost instantaneously to someone of great honor, power, prestige, or fame. I wonder if John's audience might have heard the same and thought of Emperors and the like.

It's occasions such as this, struggling to make sense of a text, that it might prove beneficial to read it along another translation. Such as, *The Message*, that renders our opening two verses as such:

When he had left, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is seen for who he is, and God seen for who he is in him. The moment God is seen in him, God's glory will be on display. In glorifying him, he himself is glorified—glory all around!

We still hear the term glory and glorified, but did you notice the difference? Hear the NRSV version one more time, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him." And one more time, *The Message*, "Now the Son of Man is seen for who he is, and God seen for who he is in him."

There is a distinct difference, which assists me in understanding what John is up to in his usage of "glorify." I now see it. Or better, I see Jesus. I see God at work in Jesus, which is exactly what John wants his reader to see and it can only be seen by observing what is to come. Jesus' glorification comes at his hour. Hear the first verse of Chapter 17 as Jesus prays, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you." (NRSV) Jesus' disciples, until this took place, could not comprehend fully all this talk about his glorification. They couldn't see him yet for who he truly was and what God sent him to do. We are told as much when John writes, "His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him. (John 12:16 NRSV).

Context matters. A point of emphasis I heard repeated at seminary. It matters throughout the Bible and certainly in John. Five verses alone do not equip the hearer to know who Jesus is. Just as we cannot understand John's usage of glorification, we cannot understand one of the most well-known passages in the Bible, his command to, "Love one another." Jesus calls it a "new" command, but again context is key. Hear Leviticus 19:18, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD." The concept of loving one's neighbor is rooted in the law given to the Israelites, the Jewish people. God's people. It is rooted in the One who gave it in the first place.

So, what is "new" about it? Again, we cannot fully understand Jesus' usage, his understanding of the love commandment without taking a closer look. A complete reading of John's gospel

and observation of the life of the Word made flesh. The Word that was with God and the Word that is God as John's informs us at the very beginning. But, let's say we were low on time and have just enough to read the entirety of Chapter 13. In so doing, we gain insight, a better understanding of the context and the love Jesus speaks of looks like. We more fully see who Jesus is and how he lives out this love.

He is gathered for a meal with his disciples when all at once he gets up from the table, dawns a towel, kneels before them and begins to wash their filthy feet. He humbly takes the form of a servant. It doesn't stop there. We are told next about the betrayal of Judas and then immediately following our passage we are told about the denials of Peter.

John then tells us, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified," which implies it happened then. But I know what you're thinking. How can that be if his glorification doesn't happen until his death, resurrection, and ascension? This is where *The Message* translation is so helpful, "Now the Son of Man is seen for who he is." It is true in that only in the cross do we see most fully the love of Jesus Christ for the world as he lays down his life. It is true that only through the resurrection do we see the power of God to raise him from the dead to new life. It is true that in the ascension we see him fulfill his promise in Chapter 14 that he will "go to prepare a place" for all who believe in him. A place in which he will take us to when he comes again.

But here in Chapter 13, we do catch a glimpse of Jesus' glorification as he bends a knee, dawns a towel, continues to eat with the betrayer and the denier. Continues to love them to the end. This is the love of Jesus. This is the love he commands his disciples have for one another. This is the love that reveals to the world they are his disciples. This is the love of a God who has come to earth in Jesus Christ. This is the love of God taking on human flesh. A love Jesus says there is none greater than, "to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15:13 NRSV). I believe this is what is "new" about this command. That God in Jesus has come down to reveal this love. To act upon this love for the world and lay down his life to redeem the world God so loves.

Love at the face value of one verse seems so nice and neat. Yet, we know it's not, which is probably why John set it amidst denial and betrayal. The washing of filthy feet. To love is not easy. It's work. It can be painful. It's humbling. It's not simply a romanticized love that leaves us feeling all warm and cozy inside. But this love that hurts, gives, sacrifices for the sake of the other, is what Jesus calls his followers to do. It is the example he has set. By this, they will know you are my disciples.

Jesus says in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter, "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples." Bearing fruit is bearing love. Bearing fruit is doing God's will. Bearing

fruit is abiding in Jesus. Dwelling in him. Resting in his love. When we do this, we glorify God. We make Jesus known. Jesus is reminding the disciples that when he ascends to be with his Father, when he is no longer present, they are his presence in the world as the promised Holy Spirit departs upon them equipping them to bear this fruit and love just as he first loved them.

The world that God loves, one that will continue to spiral out of control at times. Hearts turned against God and God's will. Sin that will continue to fester. Evil that will attempt to have its way. The disciples, then, now and to come are to be vessels of love to counter all the above. It's not easy. We will fail at times and give into sin. We will be the betrayer and the denier. But it is a love that always welcomes us back into the fold. It is a love that always welcomes us to the Table in which we are assured of the promise of forgiveness and salvation. It is a love that meets us in the waters of baptism and creates in us new hearts, reminds us we too are children of God, and washed with a love that sets us free from all that hinders our ability to love as God first loved us.

Henri Nouwen writes in his devotional *Bread for the Journey* (Harper San Francisco, 1997, August 9 Devotion):

In a world so torn apart by rivalry, anger, and hatred, we have the privileged vocation to be living signs of a love that can bridge all divisions and heal all wounds.

That's a daunting task we are called to live out. Yet, it's not a task. It's a "call." It's who we are created to be and how we are created to live – to love God and to love one another. It's a vocation we have been equipped for by the Holy Spirit our whole life. It's what sets us apart as disciples of Christ. It's how we are to respond to a love that is so amazing, unconditional, unending, unfathomable, awesome, wonderful, forgiving, sacrificial, holy, life-giving, sustaining, sacred, faithful, and just down-right AWESOME! In loving, we glorify. Glorify God. The world will know we are Christ's disciples by our love.