

It may seem odd to return to the upper room only a month after Easter, but I think today we will see that it is oddly appropriate! Jesus was all but fully “glorified” at this precise moment in the upper room. Yet he’s still a day away from the Via Dolorosa and he’s surely a few days out from the full glory of the day of resurrection. So how can he be glorified “*at once*” as Jesus says in verse 32? Dale Bruner points out that the verb for “glorified” used in verse 31 is a prophetic past tense—which refers to an utterly sure event. It may seem like a mystery as to how this can be, but perhaps Jesus was already so fully under the shadow of the cross that the glorification of the Son through suffering and sacrifice was well underway. To my thinking, something like that is exactly what happens.

But there’s also an irony here. The disciples apparently saw no glory. Indeed, had they understood the meaning behind what had just transpired between Jesus and Judas (which they did NOT understand), and what Judas’ hasty retreat really meant, then they would have been that much less likely to perceive even a glimmer of Jesus’ “glory.” Instead, they may have seen foreboding clouds of gloom or other portents of evil. But no glory, as far as I can tell. Yet there it is, clearly attested by the Savior himself.

Their lack of understanding as to the nature of this *glory* to which Jesus referred meant they also likely misunderstood the nature of the love about which Jesus subsequently spoke and recommended to them. Our passage stops short of it, but Peter’s subsequent desire to keep on following Jesus—and not have Jesus go to a place where Peter could not follow—reveals Peter’s own desire to keep on showing his love for Jesus. But what he does not know is that the love Jesus recommends is a love that might just suck the life right out of you. True, Peter says he will lay down his life for Jesus (in verse 37), but you get the feeling he’s speaking more symbolically. Or maybe he means he would like to lay down his life for Jesus, but he would just as soon this laying-down-his-life thing doesn’t become a habit!

In verse 34 Jesus says, “*As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*” The little word “As” packs a punch in this context. The Greek word is *kathos*. According to Dale Bruner the idea is that this love must fill the hearts and lives of Jesus’ disciples. It is not merely a love that imitates Christ, but actually wells up within us from the overflow of Christ’s love. The love of Christ himself needs to be IN us if we are going to live into its richness. This love is so novel, so powerful, so mind-blowing that it’s not something we could ever concoct on our own. It must be given to us.

Theologian Laura Smit says that sometimes people—sometimes theologians—talk about the traits of God, and we think that it's enough to understand what we're talking about if we take a human concept like goodness, then apply it to God, just make it bigger. We are good but God is GOOOOOOD. We think that if we can just attach an exponent to human goodness and multiply our human concept of goodness, we will approach something of what it means to understand God's goodness. But what if divine goodness is not just a really big version of human goodness, but is actually something that, while having some resemblance to human goodness, is in the end a trait with a different quality altogether?

That seems to be what Jesus is saying about LOVE in John 13. The kind of love Jesus wants us to display to the world is not just a souped-up version of human love but a love that is of a different kind, of a different quality. If that is so, this love needs to be put into us by Christ himself (and by grace alone) so that at least something of this extraordinary, amazingly sacrificial love really will grow in us—and in the church.

But given that this Sunday is 4 weeks after Easter, we should not be surprised to learn that the love Jesus recommended just prior to his death and resurrection is something that can only come to us from outside of us and only by an act of divine grace. Perhaps the problem we have in the church is not that we can't generate cozy feelings and warm fuzzies associated with love that the world around us expects from us, but that we have not allowed our union with Christ to thicken enough as to allow an entirely new self-forgetting, sacrificial love to infuse us.

Consider this: If our church is lacking in love, is it because we are not trying hard enough or because Christ is not sufficiently present among us? This scene from the Gospel of John occurred near the end of Jesus' life. During this time, he was busy telling them that he would shortly be leaving them and that he fully expected them to continue living in the way he had taught them. In fact, he more than expected it. He *commanded* that rather than give up on the world and all its problems, they must keep on trying to redeem the world by loving one another and by living out the very love that had been shown to them through the Son of God sent into this world, so that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16). In verse 35 he says, *“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

Jesus never said, “I am leaving you because I'm giving up on this rotten world, so you might as well just give up on it too.” Instead, in the very next chapter, we hear him say, *“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me*

anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you...All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:18-26). Not only John, but Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as well, make it perfectly clear that Jesus expected his disciples NOT to give up, but to continue the mission of preaching the good news, and continue living out the way of love that he taught them—for as long as they live.

So, what about us? I know there are those who believe that this world is beyond the point of redemption; that it is “every man for himself” in the 22nd year of the 21st century. And maybe it is too far gone. But that is not for you and me to decide. God is the one who began life, and God is the one who will close the book on life in God’s own time. In the meantime, we who have turned our eyes toward Jesus and decided to follow him have been given a commandment to continue in love because Jesus is “glorified.”

Whenever people who were suffering or in need came to Jesus, Jesus never said, “It’s too late. Sorry. You’re not worth saving.” Jesus healed them always. All they had to do was to express a desire that he heal them and believe that God wants the people of this world to be healed. If the whole world will not be healed, God still wants whoever desires to be healed to respond to God’s love and find life in him instead of death in this world.

You and I, who look to Jesus, must allow ourselves to become an instrument of God’s grace. Jesus asks that we do more than simply see that our names appear in the book of life. Jesus commands that we do more than just be saved. Jesus commands that we do not surrender as long as we live on this earth. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves. We are to love even our enemies. We have a mission. This earth in which we live may be corrupt and filled with poisonous attitudes and actions that people pour into it daily. But it also contains the goodness with which God created it. It is the only life we know; the only life we have.

Let’s commit to collaborating with God on the side of the goodness of God, rather than writing off the world, waiting for it to end, and letting the devil take whatever spoils remain. To love is what Jesus clearly asks us to do. Soon enough, the end will come. Let’s live as a working part of the new heaven that Jesus already brought down to earth. We are not yet with the dead, but, by the grace of God, with the living, after all.

Jesus told the disciples in that upper room that love for one another was the truest mark of being a follower of Jesus. Who knows how the disciples heard those words on that particular Passover night? But now that they (and we) have been to the Cross, the acoustics have changed. Now when we hear Jesus tell us to love one another “as” he has loved us (pay attention to that little word “as”)—his words echo in our minds in new ways when we hear them alongside Jesus’ cry of forsakenness from the cross.

Even in the glow of Eastertide those of us in the church do well to remember what the true nature of glory is for us. We in the church are not “glorified” when we amass political clout, business influence, power or glitziness as the world views those things. The nature of our glory lies elsewhere in sacrificial love, in service, and, yes, even in laying down our lives for the sake of the kingdom if it comes to that.

Some years ago, neurologist Oliver Sacks wrote about Tourette’s Syndrome, a disorder that causes victims to have physical and verbal tics: facial twitches, verbal outbursts, sometimes raunchy swear words. One man with Tourette’s whom Dr. Sacks knows was given to lunging bows toward the ground, loud shouts, and an obsessive-compulsive adjusting and readjusting of his glasses. The kicker is that this man is a highly skilled surgeon!

Somehow and for some unknown reason, when he enters the operating room, all his tics disappear for the duration of the surgery. He loses himself totally in that task. When the surgery is over, he returns to his odd quirks of glasses adjustment, shouts, and bows. Sacks does not make any spiritual comments on this, yet I find this doctor a very intriguing example of what it might mean to “lose ourselves” in a calling. When we are focused on just one thing—focused to the point that bad traits disappear—the performing of normal tasks becomes all the more remarkable. Something like that is our Christian call as we follow the *glorified* Jesus. Our task is to love one another *as Jesus loved us*. And that does not mean we tell the person who reaches for the last donut in the break room at the same time we do, “Go ahead. You take it.” It means when the ship is sinking and there is only one seat left in the lifeboat; or the plane is going down and there is only one parachute left, we say, “Go ahead, you take it.”

Loving “as” Jesus loved us becomes a reality only when our lives begin to overflow with intentional loving deeds and costly sacrificial actions. Amen.