

“Love One Another”

John 13:31-35

Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus tells us that we as Christians have a new “command”: “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” It would be easy to take our Gospel lesson and turn it into a Proverb of Moralism. Today, we could have a lesson on the “How-to’s” of Christian living. We could set up guidelines establishing exactly what we must do in order to fulfill Christ’s “command” to love one another. We could do this, but if we did, we would be missing the whole point of the Gospel.

The voice of righteousness through faith does not say, “Do this,” but rather echoes the words of Christ and says, “It is finished.”

The Gospel lesson begins, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him.” This glory that both Christ and the Father are to receive does not come from any good works or acts of love or charity that you and I show toward one another. God is not made more glorious by what we do. These words were spoken immediately after Judas had left the upper room to betray Jesus. The glorification of Christ is connected with an event that appears to all the people who witnessed it to be the very opposite of glory. Jesus is looking ahead to His death on the cross as He speaks of His glorification.

God is glorified in the fulfillment of His promise to save His children from the guilt of their sin. When Christ died on the cross and rose again, the world became a different place. All of God's children, since Adam and Eve, had been groaning and waiting in anticipation for the second Adam, Christ, to come and redeem the people.

We are the beneficiaries of this great promise that God fulfilled in Christ on Easter weekend. During this Easter season, we continue to celebrate this great event. We praise God that we do not have to go where Jesus went – that we do not have to suffer and die on a cross, especially because the spilling of our blood would do nothing to redeem us from our slavery to sin. Our sins are forgiven only because the Christ, the Son of God had His blood spilled just as God had promised to Adam and throughout the Old Testament.

Today, we gather together as the recipients of that forgiveness. Without the real blood of Christ shed on the cross, the Word of God we gather to hear, the promises made in our Baptism, the flesh and blood of Christ in the sacrament would be of no consequence in our lives. All of human history revolves around and is focused on Christ's cross and tomb.

Therefore, all of human history has been spent pondering how these events affect our lives. What must be done in order for us to receive these blessings? Once again, this is not some "How-to" of Christian living. It is not about "me" and what I do. Our sinful self always wants to hear Christ's words of grace and promise and turn it into something that we can do to save ourselves.

When Christ speaks of this "new command," it is the only time that

John records Christ using the word “new.” John is telling us that this is something very important. The word we translate “command” is rarely used and the other Gospel writers only use it in regard to guarding or keeping His Word so that the disciples can go out and proclaim it as a new commission.

“Now is the Son of Man glorified.” Where? In the crucifixion. “Where I am going you cannot come” – namely a descent into hell to proclaim victory over death and Satan.

Jesus does not endure the nails of the cross and shed His blood so that He can now instruct His disciples to go and live morally virtuous lives and be right with God by loving your neighbor. Jesus would have joined with the Pharisees if that was His message. There would be no need for the cross.

“A new command I give to you, that you love one another.” If this was about keeping the law and having love for your neighbor in a 10 commandment kind of way, that would not really be a “new” command. And, again, there would be no need for the cross. What is new is the glorification of God in the dying and rising of the Son of Man. And now Jesus commissions them with this “new” truth to go out and show love for one another so that all people will know that you are My disciples. And how does Jesus define love to His disciples in the upper room, later in John’s Gospel? “Greater love has no one than this, than that he lay down his life for his friends.” Read John chapters 14-17 and hear how “love” and

“command” are used. This is not about doing God’s will and being better neighbors. The Holy Spirit inspiring us to love our neighbor is the fruit of the Gospel – and is a very good thing.

But Jesus “new command” is about the Gospel. And His disciples would carry this new truth to the ends of the earth and they would lay down their lives for the Gospel – the Good News of Jesus Christ. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another, Jesus says.

Just as Jesus suffers and dies so that you have the Gospel and will live forever in My eternal kingdom, so also you will suffer and die (in your ministry) so that all people will have the Gospel and they will know that you are my disciples because you confess the cross and empty grave.

This is what sets us apart from the other people of this world. No one can look at you and see if you are baptized. No one can look into your heart and see if you truly believe in God. No one can look at you and see that you are forgiven. Jesus tells us that the only way that people can know that we are Christians is what we confess with our mouths and by observing the way that we treat one another. John also writes that anyone who says they love God but hate their brother is a liar.

If there is no difference between the way that we speak or act and the way that people outside the church speak or act, the message of the cross and the empty tomb will never be heard. What you have is the promise of a crucified and risen Lord and Savior. Love one another, and boldly confess Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!! Amen.