

## John 13: 31-35

13:31 After Judas had left, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man's glory is revealed; now God's glory is revealed through him.

13:32 And if God's glory is revealed through him, then God will reveal the glory of the Son of Man in himself, and he will do so at once.

13:33 My children, I shall not be with you very much longer. You will look for me; but I tell you now what I told the Jewish authorities, 'You cannot go where I am going.'

13:34 And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

13:35 If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples."

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John 15: 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.

A middle school music teacher had just organized a sixth grade beginning band in her school. The principal was so proud of the music teacher's efforts that without consulting

her he decided that the band should give a concert for the entire school. The music teacher wasn't so sure her young musicians were ready to give a concert, so she tried to talk the principal out on holding the concert, but to no avail.

Just before the concert was ready to begin, as the music teacher stood on the podium, she leaned forward and whispered to her nervous musicians, "If you're not sure of your part, just pretend to play." And with that, she stepped back, lifted her baton and with a great flourish brought it down. Lo and behold, nothing happened! The band brought forth a resounding silence. No one was willing to step up and make the effort to make a sound.

Sometimes churches are like that middle school band. We have all the parts, building, pews, hymnals but yet are we unsure of our parts, some of us are tentative in our roles, reluctant to trumpet forth the music of faith that God desires of us to have. To be secure in our faith, to be proud of our church and to bring others to God.

So, what's in it for us? Given the fact many once vibrant service organizations are dwindling in numbers. What's in it for us is to work hard for others who won't. Most people have what they need, and being part of the organization or church that doesn't provide entertainment or technology or a coffee shop with free lattes aren't worth it.

So, what's important? Are we here to serve or be served? How willing are people willing to commit and serve others and find joy? Jesus says, to love one another as I loved you and you will find joy.

It was on the news a few years ago of an incident occurred in San Antonio, Texas. It was a hot, 99-degree August day when a ten-month-old baby girl was accidentally locked in a parked car by her aunt. Frantically the mother and the aunt ran around the car in near hysteria, while a neighbor attempted to unlock the car with a coat hanger.

It had quickly become a life-and-death situation when Fred Artez, a tow-truck driver, arrived on the scene. He grabbed a hammer from his truck and smashed the backside window of the car to free the baby. Was he heralded a hero? What do you think? Not so.

The tow truck driver said the aunt whose car the baby in was upset because I broke the window. Fred said I was committed to help that baby no matter what. "What's more important -- a love you have for that baby's life or a window?"

I pray that most of the choices we have to make in life are not between what is trivial and what is important. Rather, between what is important and what is more important. This morning's Gospel reading is so timely for us because it

shows us what is most important.

As we gather in worship today we affirm that the greatest blessing that God has given to us and it is simply his love—God's love that forgives us our sins and makes us children of God; God's love that brings us together into a fellowship with one another; God's love that sends us forth to proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus, our Savior.

We gather together as a congregation to affirm to one another what is most important for us -- God's love, compassion and forgiveness. As Jesus says, "A new commandment I give to you: that you should love one another, even as I have loved you.

By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Please note this first and foremost, God desires of us is that we unselfishly commit to love one another. We may tithe. We may teach. We may sing or serve or sacrifice. We may visit on behalf of our congregation, preach the Gospel, clean the kitchen, and even sing in the world-famous Paint Creek tabernacle choir, and all of these things are of vital importance to a congregation. They are wonderful and important to our life together.

But if we do not do them out of love for God, if we do not

love one another, we miss what God desires from us.

I came across a Charles Schultz Peanut cartoon showing Lucy standing with her arms folded and a resolute expression on her face, while Charlie Brown pleads with her.

Charlie Brown says, "Lucy, have you heard that song entitled, "What the World Needs now is Love Sweet Love?" Sometimes Lucy I feel you must try to be more loving. The world needs love. Just think, you could make this world a better place, just by showing love to others."

At that Lucy whirls around angrily and Charlie goes flipping over backwards. Lucy is screaming at this point and says, "Look, you blockhead, I do love this world. But it's people like you I can't stand!"

Sadly, even me as a person of God, who took a vow to shepherd God's people, I think that sometimes I can identify with that remark. It's easy to love in the abstract – but the world and people in general, they can at times drive us crazy. And yet it is precisely those people who God says we are to love. The people nearest to us, our neighbors next door, the people we sit next to in church, strangers, family... that is who Jesus calls us to love.

Love in action and pride in being a disciple for Jesus Christ

-- that's what we are talking about this morning. Love which finds expression in kindness, courtesy, tolerance, and acceptance of those around us. Yes, some of you say, love is easier to preach than to go out and do it.

Mark Twain on this same topic... said this, "Love, it's another thing altogether to put Christ's love into action and to show it in our attitudes and actions toward others.

I remember a preacher telling me once, "We are judged by our actions, not our intentions." I told that preacher, We may have a heart of gold, but then, so does a hard-boiled egg."

Love one another. As a congregation, we are called to care for one another, to set aside our preconceived notions of who is and who is not acceptable to God. *For the ground at the foot of the cross is level.* We are all sinners.

We have all fallen short of the glory that God expects of us and we are all received into God's goodness by God's grace, not by our own doing. It is God's love that unites us and it is God's love that we are called to share it with each other.

That means that our lives must be characterized by love in action. Jesus says, "As I have loved you, love one another." Most authorities tell us that love is a learned response. Go ahead, dissect and debate what love is exactly.

Take all the psychology texts written on it and boil them down to their essential truth and I believe you'd have difficulty coming up with a better rule for life than that. "As I have loved you, love one another."

Even when we fail to love, to forgive others, point the finger, seek getting even.... And even if we stop loving God and stop coming to church....even if you said what's in it for me... God forgives, he never tells you, see I told you so, never...never does he stop loving you, ever!!!!

That's what we are talking about this morning: learning to love one another. Christian congregations are to model love. for one another and in doing so, we too grow and learn to love. Look at the foundation of this love laid down for us. Look at the plaques found around this church. Look at the names of the men and women living now in heaven that made a difference to the Howarth and the Paint Creek Churches.

Like them, we affirm that God has laid a good foundation for us. And in the center of this foundation is Jesus Christ. We might well say with Paul, from 1 Corinthians 2, "I have resolved to know nothing among you except that Jesus Christ loved us and because he loved us, he was crucified and died to set us free from sin and death." The source of our love and of our blessing is Christ Jesus.

So, we know that the word that Jesus gives us today, this command to love, to go out and bring others in. It is not a legalistic requirement laid upon us by Jesus, rather a natural response of our hearts to the love and to care. The love given to us is the unconditional, undeserved, unlimited. That love is also called Grace.

Jesus says, "As I have loved you, love one another." The truth is that we love because he first loved us. We enjoy the benefits of this congregation because others experienced God's love here, some of them, you never met and over the years decided to share that love through their time, their gifts and efforts with others.

They experienced God's love in this very place and decided to sacrificed their time, their prayers, their talents to share and make God's love the foundation for all future (Howarth/ Paint Creek) congregations to come.

And now it is your turn. It is our time to experience God's love and share it with others. It is our turn to experience God's love in action in our lives and to sacrifice to make it real for others.

So, what if we live in a world that is increasingly hostile to

the Christian faith, so what if we now live in a world that grows more and more self-centered every day. So, what if the world has lost the meaning of the word "sacrifice," and does not understand the commitment of faith. Well, it is what it is.

But regardless, this is still the world in which we are called to share God's love. Even when we are among those who find it difficult to love others. Even when we are among those whose time is so limited and we willingly look for reasons not to make time for Christian fellowship and church.

As we gather today and hear Jesus' word to us, our prayer is that God would strengthen us for service to God and to help us to love one another. We pray that God would use the example of Jesus' love in action to teach us how to love as well, and to lift our vision to heaven above and be set afire by the Holy Spirit and faith.

Love for one another is the primary witness of the church in the world today. Jesus made that clear when he said, "By this... everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Let us pray....

Heavenly Father, help us to stay connected to your love. Allow your love to surround us, to shape our hearts and to mold our lives in the image of Jesus. Lord God, even when

we feel the world is filled with people concerned about themselves first, characterized with an impersonal "what's in it for me" attitude, you have stand tall to witness to something more important – and that is to share your love and to care about others. Let us to have an attitude of gratitude to take up your instruments of love and play! Let this church be the band of faithful, willing to strike up a tune laid out before us, a song for all to hear and feel. The tune which says, "As I have loved you, love one another." Amen.

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