

John 13:31-35

At the last supper, when Judas had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 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.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Good morning. I want to start this morning with some wisdom from a great theologian from our modern day. His name is Charles. You probably have heard of him...the great theologian, Charles Shultz, the creator of the Peanuts comic strip.

This past Christmas I received this book from my daughter, Amber. It contains some great wisdom, two pieces of which I would like to share this morning.

In the first one you see Lucy, in the far left box, standing with her arms folded and a determined look on her face. Charlie Brown is pleading with her. "Lucy," the bubble above his head says, "you must be more loving." In the next square he continues, "The world needs love. Make this world a better place, Lucy, by loving someone else." Next you see Lucy whirl back towards Charlie Brown with anger in her eyes and her mouth wide open and Charlie goes flipping over backwards by the force of her scream. "Look, you blockhead," Lucy yells. "The world I love. It's people I can't stand!"

Have you ever heard something like that come out of someone's mouth? Have you ever felt something like that within your own heart? It's easy to love in the abstract -- the world, people in general. We have no problem with that. It's the particular people around us that drive us crazy.

But the thing is that it is exactly those people around us, people nearest to us, with whom we work and go to school, neighbors next door with the noisy kids and the barking dog, our family members that disappoint us or anger us, even the people we sit near to in church, it is these people that we see every day or every week that Jesus calls us to love. Love is a person to person thing.

I have another one. This one starts out with Lucy, angry again, chasing Charlie Brown yelling, "It's no use running!" Charlie Brown ducks behind a tree, but Lucy is right there with threats in her eyes and a raised fist. They round the back of the house and you can see that Lucy is getting closer as she screams, "I'll knock your block off, Charlie Brown!"

Finally, Charlie Brown stops and turns to Lucy and says, "Hold everything! We can't carry on like this. We have no right to act this way. The world is filled with problems. People hurting each other. People not understanding other people. Now, if we as children, can't solve what are relatively minor problems, how can we expect to..." WHACK! Charlie Brown is flying through the air.

In the final panel, as Lucy walks away and Charlie Brown is sprawled on the ground, she explains to a friend, "I had to hit him quick. He was beginning to make sense." If I didn't know better, I would say that they were politicians.

Love is a person to person thing and Love calls us beyond ourselves.

In our Gospel passage for this morning from John, Jesus is in the upper room with the twelve. The Last Supper had taken place around that table. Bread broken, wine poured, all of it distributed and consumed. Jesus had wrapped a towel around his waist and had finished washing their feet, in order to set an example. Judas had received the morsel of bread that Jesus had dipped in the wine and had left to go and do what he intended to do. They are getting ready to leave to go to the Mount of Olives where they were staying, but before they leave Jesus stops them and tells them one last thing. He gives them a new, final commandment.

"Our remaining time together is short," He explains. "And so now I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

He is telling them that Love is the key, but not just any love. Love each other, love everyone, as Jesus loved you and loves them.

Love each other as a Healer...

Use Love to bring wholeness, and wellness, and new life. Love is both the medicine and the vitamin. As a vitamin, Love uplifts, builds up, the person to be what and who they were created to be...healthy, and whole, and strong. But it also a medicine. It stands against any and every thing, any and every ailment, confusion, misunderstanding, misdirection that diminishes and misleads people. As medicine, it defeats those things that tear us down, that weaken us, that try to rob us of life.

Love each other as a Teacher...

Jesus brought and taught truth and reality. He helped them to see and he helped them to hear. He brought understanding and perspective. In Loving as Jesus Loved, we are to do the same. We are to teach. Teach with words. Teach through example. We should be faithful followers by being dedicated leaders. We should be faithful followers *so that we can be* dedicated leaders. We need to first be learners before we can be teachers. Our job, in Love, is to listen to Jesus, learn from Christ, and then share that understanding, his truth, through our lives with each person we meet.

Love each other as a provider...

Just like Jesus did, we should Love others by providing for their needs when they are not able to do it for themselves. But this also means that, when possible, we need to Love others by providing them with the equipping and the respect so that they will be able to come to provide for themselves so that eventually they might embrace the privilege of becoming providers for others who find themselves in need.

As disciples, we should take the bread and the fish that we have received and allow them to be multiplied for the sake of Christ's Love, as an example of God's Love. As disciples, we should take the strength and dignity that we have found and spread that into the lives of those being held down.

And we should Love sacrificially...

As Jesus Loved us, so we should Love each other. Our Love, as disciples, should be outward focused. It should not be about what we will gain but rather about what others might find, through us. It is not about finding our reward, which has already been secured and made real in our lives, but rather about helping others find their way to the life that they were made for, the one that God intends for them and all of us.

Right before Jesus is arrested and tried and killed because of the dysfunction of humanity he tells us all that, if we are to make any difference, Love must be our identity. But it is not a description of who we are. It is a description of whose we are. The Love that we are called to is not a creation of ours. It is a reflection of Christ. It is person to person and it calls us, it pushes us, beyond ourselves.

So, I think God has a question for us this morning. Who is that person that you are being asked to Love in Jesus name, today? Who is that person who you are being asked to bring healing to? Who is that person who you are being sent to be an example to, today? Who is that person that needs you to bring something to their lives; materially, emotionally, spiritually; that

they can't find for themselves? Who is that person for whom God is calling you to lay aside your wants and your desires, maybe even your life, for?

It is easy to "love" the world. Let's each try loving the next person we meet, because by Loving, as we have been loved, they will catch a glimpse of God.

True Love is person to person, it calls us beyond ourselves, and it leads people to the source of all Love.

Amen