

You have the privilege today of hearing the voice of God in the preaching of His Word, and in particular you have the privilege of listening to the beginning of Jesus' final instructions to His disciples before His death. These are the last words of Jesus, and they are hugely important and foundational for following Jesus. It shouldn't surprise you to find three major emphases in this passage: Worship - "Now is the Son of Man glorified", Community - "Love one another", and Mission: "By this all people will know that you are my disciples."

We didn't pick these themes as the heart of what our church is about because they were catchy or useful. Worship, community, and mission are all we talk about because they are what Jesus talked about. These three ideas set the agenda for the Church, and here in John 13:31-35, we see it clearly and concisely. What is the church about? What does it mean to follow Jesus? What should we here in Annapolis be focused on as a congregation? Here is what Jesus says to His disciples: being a Church means making the glory of Jesus visible by love. This is what sets us apart as the people of God. *Glory* (v.31-32) *made visible* (v.35) *by love* (v.34).

The *reason why* we follow Jesus is that we have been captivated by His glory. When we look at Jesus, we see the glory of God, and the sight is so wonderful, so attractive, so worthwhile that we cannot turn away! We see in Jesus everything that is good and true and beautiful in this world, and we refuse to be distracted by anything else. Giving glory to Jesus means making Him our priority, fixing our eyes on Him, worshiping Him for who He is, and what He has done.

The *way in which* we follow Jesus, the way we live out our appreciation and adoration, is by loving one another just as He loved us. Glory causes *adoration*, and adoration results in *imitation*. You become what you worship, you become what you love. And since we see in Jesus greater love than any man has ever demonstrated in all the world, when we gaze into the face of that love, we are transformed into His image, and we start showing that same love to one another. This is His commandment to us, and it is the natural reaction of saved people. This is the law of love: Behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and adore Him in such a way that adoration produces imitation. Love Jesus; live like Jesus.

The *effect* of following Jesus in this way is *illumination*, light for the world. When we see the glory of Jesus, we are like solar panels soaking up energy from the sun. When that energy is put to work in the service of Christian love, whole congregations just light up and glow in the darkness, an unmistakable glow that signals the presence of Jesus. And this is important, because this is how people stumbling around in the dark find their way to Jesus! You are the light of the world, and the fuel that burns to produce that light is *love*, and that burning love makes the glory of Jesus *visible* to all people.

Beholding the glory of God causes us to reflect the glory of God, and so when others see Jesus' glory by means of our love for each other, they are able to come and worship Him too. On the other hand, if the world cannot see the glorious love of Jesus on display in His disciples, they won't see it *anywhere*. Remember, Jesus is gone – that's verse 33 - “Yet a little while I am with you; where I am going you cannot come.” Jesus is going away! How will people be able to find Him? Where will the world see His glory? The way Jesus puts His glory on display in the world is through *you*, and so if people cannot see the love of Jesus at work in you, *specifically*, in how you show love to the body of Christ, *then we have completely failed as a church*. We've lost sight of His glory, and so we don't reflect His glory, and so no one else sees His glory in us.

It is important to get this right: ***It isn't how you love God that shines the light of Jesus***. It isn't watching you worship that lets people know that you are Jesus' disciples. Many people think that worship needs to be impressive or attractive so that all people will be able to find Jesus because of the glory of the cathedral, the skill of the band, the rhetorical punch of the message. But worship is not where mission takes place. Worship is the *fuel* for mission, but you don't go for a drive *at the gas station*. You fuel up there, but unless your idea of a road trip is very different than mine, you don't just keep circling the pumps!

And get this, too: ***it isn't your love for those outside the church that shines the light of Jesus***. It's your love *for one another*. This is surprising and challenging to a lot of ideas about how to do mission. What's the foundation of outreach? Inreach. If you want to make Christianity more attractive to the world, don't spend all your time showing the world how much Christians love the world. Show the world how much *Christians love Christians*.

This seems counterintuitive, maybe even a little selfish. If I have money, time, and energy to love someone, shouldn't I focus on the lost, rather than on other Christians? This shows up in practical ways: should I attend a prayer meeting, or should I go share the gospel? Should we take meals to members of the congregation, or to those outside? Should we pay the electric bill for someone outside the church, or should we help church members put their kids in a Christian school? Which one makes the glory of Christ, and the glory of being in Christ, visible? John 13 says that it is the love we have for one another that makes the glory of Jesus visible to the world.

Being a disciple of Jesus should look attractive, but if all the benefits of being a disciple are given out regardless of whether or not you actually *are* a disciple, then becoming a disciple loses it's attractiveness, and you miss the glory of Jesus. If, when we say, “Look how glorious Jesus is! He does this for us, that for us, everything for us when we follow Him!” people answer, “But I get all that without following Jesus.” then we've severed the link between Jesus and His benefits, between gift and giver, between God's glory and God's love.

Now, the message is not “Don't ever show love to outsiders.” That's not it at all! Focus on the household of faith, but do good to everyone. The bread is for the children, not for the dogs, but the dogs get the crumbs! But *get your priorities straight*: the Church will never be effective at her mission if she is not full of people who love one another like Christ loved us! Unless we love each other, no one will want to join us! **We should be showing *special love to Christians*, so that others will want to become Christians, and then we should make it easy to become a Christian!**

Because that's the good news: anyone can become a Christian, anyone can receive God's love! But no one comes to God apart from faith in Christ, which means that you cannot have *the benefits of Christ* without *faith in Christ*. The special love that Christians have for one another is not *selfishly opposed* to evangelistic concerns – loving each other *instead of* outsiders – it is *inherently evangelistic* – loving each other *for the sake of* outsiders – by focusing more on loving Christians, we're prompting outsiders to become Christians so that they can share in our love.

The point of the passage is this: if you want more people to find Jesus, you need to love one another like Jesus. And in order to be able to love one another like Jesus, you need to be filled up and overflowing with the vision of the glory of Jesus. Because if (in your eyes) Jesus isn't all that glorious, then you aren't going to restructure your whole life in imitation of Him, and if your life doesn't look like His, then when people look at your life, they won't see Jesus.

So how can we love one another like Jesus loved us? The first thing we need to do is look again at just how it was that Jesus loved His disciples. We pick up this passage in John's gospel in the middle of things: “when he had gone out.” And so we can't just keep going; we need to answer a couple questions before the glory that Jesus talks about makes sense. When *who* had gone out? *Judas*. When Judas had gone out *from what*? From the shared passover meal before Jesus' crucifixion.

Doesn't that change how you hear what Jesus says? *When Judas had forsaken Jesus and the company of the disciples and had gone out to betray his master for 30 pieces of silver*, Jesus said “Now is the Son of Man glorified.” Not “Now is the Son of Man in trouble.” Not “Now is the Son of Man disappointed that someone He had invested so much time and love into is going to betray Him.” When Judas leaves the upper room to initiate that series of events that will result in the death of Jesus, Jesus looks deeply into what that action means, and sees what He is about to suffer for the sake of His friends, and His conclusion is “Glory!” Now He has the chance to show the world unimaginably glorious love.

Brothers and sisters, the glory of Jesus made visible by the love that Jesus has for you is seen most clearly, most brightly, and most vividly in what Jesus did after Judas left that room and

delivered Him into the hands of His enemies. The *glory* of Jesus and the *love* of Jesus, the actions that caused God to be *glorified in Jesus* and to then turn around and pour out glory *on* Jesus, are found here: greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.

That's the glory of God, and that's what Jesus wants you to make visible to others. And so He turns to you and says, "A new commandment I give you: *love each other like that*. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." This is where adoration becomes imitation.

And here's what happens: when God's people obey this command, they commit to laying down their lives for one another, from the smallest of ways (like washing each other's feet or watching each other's children), to the greatest of ways (like selling your house so that your brother will have enough to eat or laying down your life for your sister in Christ). This is the commandment that Jesus gives to the Church: love one another with self-sacrificial love.

When the world sees suffering coming, it decides that that's where love ends. If this relationship is going to bring me pain, then I'm out. Isn't this the story of countless divorces, fractured business partnerships, broken friendships? *It hurt, so I left*. That's the way of the world, but the commandment that Jesus gives His people is to show the world a *better way*, the way that we see when we look at the cross. Jesus saw suffering coming and said: now it's time to show the world the glory of God's love. *Now is the Son of Man glorified*.

So as Christians, Christ's disciples, we can't say "I'll love you until you cause me pain, or frustrate me, or get on my nerves, or sin against me." You are not allowed to let those things overcome your love. Jesus *requires* that you love your brothers and sisters more than that. He loved you enough to die for your sins, and that love is what is shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Spirit. When Christians stop loving each for any reason short of death, then they are denying the glory of God. But when Christians love each other unto death, even though it hurts, even though it is costly, even though it would be easier to walk away, then it becomes blindingly obvious to the world that people who love each other *like that* are followers of Jesus. That's how the glory of Jesus is made visible by your love.

When Judas leaves, Jesus sees more suffering coming His way than you could possibly imagine, and He says, "Now it's glory time." Now is the time not for love to *end*, but for love to be made perfect. "I will suffer for you", Jesus says, "I will hurt for you, bleed for you, die for you, because I love you." That's the glory of Jesus, and that's the glory that Jesus wants the whole world to see, and that's why He commands you to love one another just like He loved you, so that all people will know that you are His disciples, if you have that love for one another.

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*