

The Fifth Sunday Of Easter
May 2, 2010
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

John 13:31-35

When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (NIV)

People today are not always very loving. It breaks your heart to hear that story in Massachusetts about a girl being bullied by a group of other teenagers - bullied to the point where she tragically decides it is better to end her own life. Our world is not always a loving place. About a week ago in New York a person was mugged and all the people watched except for one, that one who actually tried to help was killed for his efforts. There is a great need for more love even closer to home. Recently, in just another over the Rhine shooting, in Cincinnati, this time a person was shot on a crowded street in broad daylight. The police officers went up and down the road talking to witnesses, but not a single person would speak up about what they saw. Are Jesus' words about what it is going to be like living in these last days ringing in our ears? **"Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold" (Matthew 24).**

Maybe now more than ever we need this command Jesus speaks to us this morning - **"love one another."** Perhaps, because of the way our world is today, Jesus' disciples have a chance to be lights shining in a dark place by living a life of love. Maybe now more than ever there is an urgency and opportunity to love by pointing others to the love of a Savior who died for them and a God who just happens to be love. Dear friends, listen carefully this morning as Jesus talks about giving us a new commandment. May we take to heart, may we follow, may we see anew every day, and may we never grow tired of - **Jesus' command of love.**

On Thursday evening in this upper room the disciples did not have to look very far to see love in action. They didn't have to search very hard to see the love that would motivate their love for one another. Such love stood before them in their Lord - the Lord who had just earlier put a towel around His waist and performed the job of a servant by washing the dirt off of all of their dusty feet. But Jesus' was about to demonstrate His love for them in a much greater way. We read: **"When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come."**

Jesus says now is the time for **"the Son of Man,"** God Himself wrapped in true human flesh and blood, to be glorified. Jesus was about to bring glory to God and Himself. How? Judas had just left and set in motion all the events that were about to take place. Betrayal, arrest, trials, beatings, scourging, suffering, crucifixion, death,

burial, descent, resurrection, and then ascension. The Son of Man would finish all the work God sent His Son to do. He would pay for the sin of the world, die for all people, and provide salvation for all mankind. The love that moved Jesus to such actions for us is a love greater that we can ever really wrap our arms around. Jesus would suffer for sinners - the righteous to die for the unrighteous - the perfect Lamb sacrificed for wayward sheep.

With Judas on his way and all these events about to take place, Jesus turns to his disciples and says **“my children”** - using a term of loving endearment. Jesus tells them where He is going they cannot come. Jesus will pay the price for sin, the wages of eternal death, and Jesus will do it alone. Jesus will take care of it all - all sin will be paid for and died for and washed away by His blood. For a while the disciples will grieve. They will look but for a time they will not see or find Jesus. But in a little while they would. On the third day they will see. Then they will have a whole new perspective on love.

That is what Jesus means when He says: **“A new command I give you: Love one another.”** Please understand this command is not new in the sense of time - it had been given thousands of years earlier on Mt. Sinai. But now this command to love would have a new quality to it - a freshness. They would see it from a whole new angle because of Jesus' love for them. Now they had witnessed real agape love - total, selfless, self-sacrificing, unconditional, and undeserved love. Now they truly knew love, as the apostle John writes elsewhere: **“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us” (1 John 3)**. After seeing their Savior suffer, bleed, and die on the cross to pay for their sin how could they not see love in a whole new light?

And how can we not either? Yet, when we go back to Mt. Sinai and God's commands to love one another how have we done? Like the Israelites of old, we have broken these commands to love before the ink even has time to dry. It just seems to make us feel better about ourselves to spread or listen to good gossip and dirt on someone, rather than defend them or talk about people in a positive light. How many times do we immediately think the worst of others, instead of taking people's words and actions in the kindest possible way? When is the last time we were filled with jealousy, envy, or even a little hatred toward another person? Try to count up in a single day how many times our words and actions prove to be very unloving or uncaring toward another.

That is why is so good for us to keep going back into this upper room with Jesus on the night before His death. Jesus loved us with a perfect life of love - a life He willingly laid down to pay for all our gossip, and envy, and our every uncaring and unloving word and deed. Because of His love we are forgiven and redeemed children of God. I used to have a teacher who said: **“Do what I say and not what I do.”** That saying always kind of bothered me. But Jesus is not a teacher who says or does anything like that, instead Jesus says: **“As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”** Jesus is more than just our example. He is our Savior - our Savior who teaches us how to love one another. In fact, Jesus says **“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”** Jesus says this is how the world will recognize us to be His, by the way we love each other.

This has always been true of Christ's church. Since the time of the apostles the distinguishing characteristic of Jesus' followers is love. In the second century men named Marcus Felix, and Lucian marveled and scoffed at the brotherly love of Christians

saying and writing: *“Behold how they love one another!.....They love one another, even before knowing one another.”*... *“They love each other because their Master Jesus Christ has made them believe that they are all brethren.”* In the fourth century, Julian the Apostate made this charge against the Christians whom he persecuted: *“These Christians give themselves to this kind of humanity. Now we see what it is that makes them such powerful enemies of our gods. It is the brotherly love that they manifest toward others.”*

May we constantly be guilty of such charges. I have seen that kind of love here at Amazing Grace. I have seen people reach out to help each other - care for one another - do selfless things for one another. I have witnessed disciples of Jesus who love because He first loved us. I pray we grow in this love. I pray we learn from Jesus to be even more kind, and generous, and caring, and selfless and good to one another. After all, we have the perfect Teacher and we too have witnessed what true love really is all about.

A doctor tells a story about a little boy who was told he could save his sister's life by giving her some of his blood. His little six year old sister was near death due to a disease from which the boy earlier had made a marvelous recovery. Now her only chance was a blood transfusion from someone who had conquered the illness, and since the kids had the same rare blood type, the boy was an ideal donor. *“Johnny, would you like to give your blood for Mary?”* the doctor asked. The boy hesitated and his lower lip started to tremble. Then he smiled and said, *“Sure Doc. I'll give my blood to my sister.”* Soon the two children were wheeled into the operating room---Mary pale and thin; Johnny, robust and the picture of health. As the blood was siphoned one could almost see the new life come into the little girl's tired body. The transfusion was about over when Johnny's brave voice broke the silence, *“Say Doc, when do I die?”* It was only then the doctor realized what the boy's hesitation and trembling lip had meant. Little Johnny thought that in giving his blood to his sister he was giving up his life.

My friends, isn't that a beautiful picture of selfless, self-sacrificing love? Yet, we have seen love even greater for Jesus willingly shed His own blood and actually gave up His own life not for family or friends, but for sinners - for you and for me. Now this is the kind of selfless love Jesus commands us to freely give to one another. It is the kind of love that is sometimes very hard to find in this world, but it is this love that sets Jesus and all those who live by faith in Him apart from others. Today, in Bible study we are going to talk about eliminating debt, but as Jesus teaches I pray that there is one debt we never finish paying - *“the continuing debt to love one another” (Romans 13)*. Amen.