

May 15, 2022, The 5th Sunday of Easter: John 13:31-35

A new commandment I give you, that you love one another. As I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this everyone will know you are my disciples... Jesus gives us what he pointedly calls a “new” commandment. The newness involves not *that* we are to love but *how* we are to love: *...love one another, as I have loved you...*

Jesus loves with startling **honesty**. Jesus preferred the sick and dying, the rough, trampled, and forgotten, the sinners and unwashed rabble. Such people have few pretensions. Jesus spoke with the woman at the well honestly about her many marriages. Jesus looked with love on the rich young overachiever who thought himself righteous. Jesus never stopped loving the thick-as-a-brick disciples. Jesus’ followers obviously experienced his love keenly: they kept on risking, kept making fools of themselves with wild abandon. Jesus’ honest love allowed them to be honest with him, and with one another.

To love others honestly one first accepts Jesus’ honest love. We say, “God is love”; is it a cliché? Do you know in your heart: Jesus loves you. You are as big a pain in the neck as anyone you know, and Jesus treasures you. Our sins do not separate us from God; it is our dishonesty: our refusal to ask God’s forgiveness; our insistence we know better than God; our unwillingness to be restored, made whole. Until we want the fullness of Jesus’ love in our own lives, we will never truly love.

There is no secret to honest love: keep on asking God fervently, persistently to help you accept Jesus’ love; ask God fervently, patiently to help you love others honestly. As we know Jesus’ love, we will want to love others as Jesus loves. This will always be a place of tension and testing; it is also the place of triumph through God’s love at work in us.

Jesus’ love is full of **mercy**. Mercy is generosity and kindness to someone weak, helpless, or suffering. To love with mercy is born from the awareness of the tragedy in us all. Who escapes pain, disappointment, wounds, and hurts; who has not experienced death and loss? Who is without anger and resentment? Who does not carry guilt and regret? Even children know of such things. Everyone desires mercy.

Jesus has first-hand experience, too. Jesus went to the cross, not out of obligation, but out of love. Jesus went to the place of ultimate human disintegration, to bring life. His mercy is the pledge of his longing for us. *Surely, he has borne our grief and carried our sorrows....* The mercy of God flows from Jesus into any suffering, dying, dark human heart. This is how Jesus loves.

To love with mercy is to offer kindness, not criticism; generosity, not judgment; mercy sees the brokenness in others through one’s own brokenness. Mercy is the willingness to go through tragedy with the other because we know tragedy is not the end. Mercy does not count the cost; rather we offer both love and cost to God.

To love with honesty and mercy does not mean becoming co-dependent because the love of Jesus brings **healing**. There are physical healings in the Bible, and there are healings of hearts, minds, and souls. Each person healed responded to Jesus’ promise of wholeness. In their brokenness they received Jesus’ promise of wholeness. Jesus will not just put a few Band-Aids on you. Jesus intends to heal you completely, transforming your mortal, broken, dying life into the divine life of God. As Paul wrote, *...so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life...* (2 Corinthians 5:4).

We are called to receive and share Jesus’ healing love. Pray for God’s transformation for your life with fervent hope. With God’s love at work in you, you will bring God’s healing to others. At times, this may take heroic effort on your part. More often God’s healing comes through us into others’ lives in simple words and actions of acceptance, understanding, and hope. Jesus calls you in your brokenness to give yourself to the love of Jesus. In the giving and receiving you find your true self, your true vocation in the image and likeness of Jesus, who loves his beloved with honesty and mercy, who is healing us into joyful wholeness.

“...love one another as I have loved you....by this everyone will know you are my disciples....” Holy Spirit write this new commandment with fire on our hearts, to God’s glory.

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive, be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, now and forever. Amen.