

Sermon for Easter 5 - Synod Sermon for Region 9
Pr. Patti Axel – Southeastern Synod
Assistant to the Bishop and Director for Evangelical Mission

John 13:31-35

Glory to You, O Lord

³¹When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³²If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³Little 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.’ ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to You, O Christ

We are one in the Spirit, We are one in the Lord
We are one in the Spirit, We are one in the Lord
And we pray that our unity will one day be restored
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
Yeah they'll know we are Christians by our love

Gracious and Holy Lord, you give us a new commandment. Every day, you send us out into the world to love and serve and minister to our neighbor; our hungry neighbor, our homeless neighbor, our neighbor who does not look like us. We love because Jesus has loved us and they will know we are his disciples, if we have love for one another. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer.

Love is a four letter word. It is a very powerful and demanding word that calls us to a new way of living; of being, of carrying out the kin-dom of the world in which we live. Love is a word based on faith - faith that God is bigger than any politician who carries power like a weapon. Love is a word based on hope - hope that violence and anger and hate and fear will be obliterated by love and faith and hope and mercy in a world where weapons are changed into utensils for serving food and eating together at long tables and spades for turning over soil to plant vegetables and fruit to feed hungry people! That is what love can do!!

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
Yeah they'll know we are Christians by our love

Jesus has shown his disciples how to live lives of love and mercy. Just by following him around the Galilean countryside, they have seen him heal the sick and reach out to widows and children who rush to see him. They have seen him sit down at tables with Pharisees and Scribes and other learned, important people and he has challenged them, gently sometimes and not so gently at other times. He has shown them a new way of being in the world, in a world where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer and power is wielded by priest and soldier alike. They have seen him in a rage in the temple, turning over tables of injustice and greed while peasants scrape together coins to buy a dove to sacrifice. Jesus has shown his disciples how to live together while they walk. They don't always see eye to eye. James and John want to sit next to Jesus and Jesus sits next to Judas and hands him food to eat.

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
Yeah they'll know we are Christians by our love

Jesus calls them together on the last night he is alive and talks to them about life in the world and how it should be. He provides food to eat and wine to drink and he strips down to his underwear to wash their feet because that is what love does. Jesus knows what will happen and he loves them anyway. Judas will betray and Peter will deny but Jesus will love and as he hangs on the cross he forgives and redeems a criminal because that is what love does.

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
Yeah they'll know we are Christians by our love

How does your life tell of your faith and your discipleship? How does your life tell the story of God's love, played out in service and toil together and play and community? You have stories to tell of houses built and gardens planted and empty fields being cleaned up so a playground can be built for children to play safely. You have stories to tell of lonely shut ins being visited by youth who bring flowers and sing. I have heard your stories and I have hope and my faith is strengthened by your example of Christ - love. We have work to do my friends. Our love must be louder and stronger and softer than fear and disappointment and hurt. Hurt people hurt people but love stops the violence and replaces it with hope. Belonging and community and fellowship must be a priority in all of our neighborhoods because that is what heals the world we live in. Do we believe that God's love is stronger? I hope so. I see it in your eyes and I hear it in your songs. Do we have hope that God is guiding and plowing and making the way straight for our journey? I hope so. I see it in your actions to those who sleep on the stairs of your churches. I see it when you spread a table before them and

welcome them to sit in your pews even when their clothes are dirty and they haven't bathed in days.

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
Yeah they'll know we are Christians by our love

We have work to do so the Beloved Community is a reality in every neighborhood and every single mother or single father is welcomed in to the family of God and grandmas gather up their children and pass out hugs and kisses. We have work to do and letters to write so that our grandmas and grandpas can afford their meds and their homes and food for their tables. We have work to do so that Black and Brown lives matter and queer lives are celebrated and children can feel protected and parented by two Dads or two Moms if that is how it works out. We have work to do my friends because Love will not stand by and watch while children are bullied and lives are taken too early because the pain was too much to bear. We have work to do my sisters and brothers and we cannot wait for someone else to do it for us. We do not do the work of God in a vacuum. We gather and pull up our sleeves and grab our hammers or lawn mowers or mops and rags and we clean up the corner we live in. We reach out to hold the hand of the veteran on the street with a sign, "will work for food" and then we work together to find jobs for those who need them and homes for those who are cold and lonely and food for those who are hungry and love for those who are heartbroken and we do not stop until we have filled every tummy and clothed every naked one and lifted those who are in the pit out of it. We have work to do and bodies to do it and lips that will sing praise and arms that hug and hands to write letters and legs that can walk down streets and arms to carry signs. We cannot do it without love! Love is the glue and the balm and the fuel that heals the world and we will keep at it because God gives us the strength to carry on. Love is stronger than evil and neighbors who work together will save the world and God will carry the day!

We will work with each other, we will work side by side
We will work with each other, we will work side by side
And we'll guard each one's dignity and save each one's pride
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
Yeah, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

Amen and Amen