

## Love Your Neighbour

This morning we pick up the threads of Jesus' conversation with the disciples on the occasion of the Last Supper.

The Last Supper was thought to have taken place on Maundy Thursday, the last night Jesus dined with his beloved ones in an upper room somewhere on the outskirts of Jerusalem.

It was also the night he gave them their ultimate mandate: To love one another in all situations and all circumstances.

Jesus knows that he is about to lay down his life for his beloved followers and he knows there will be much trouble to come.

Here, this morning in John's gospel, we hear again the intimate nature of the relationship between Jesus and his beloved followers.

It's an intimate relationship we see mirrored in his own relationship with God as his heavenly Father.

Here, we gather with the disciples whose shared passion for being in community in a new way has completely changed their lives.

Were they aware that there will be no going back?

No return to normal?

Here, as Jesus makes final preparation for his own death on the cross, here he offers his followers one more teaching on the meaning of love.

Of course, its not a schmaltzy or romantic understanding of love-its more of an understanding of love as self-emptying.

It's the kind of love that will have Jesus laying down his own life in the name of all he holds dear.

He offers all this and more for the sake of a new world a bornin' where all shall feel welcomed, loved, and included.

He offers this in his dream for a world where the last shall be first and the needs of the poor and the marginalized will be celebrated over and against the needs of the rich and the powerful.

His commandment of love is also an invitation for us to do the same, trusting in our own experience of being God's chosen or beloved ones.

In the world of my imagination, it feels as though Jesus is showering this community of friends and followers with the blessing of God's love, a love

experienced together in joy and in pain and in sorrow yet to come.

“Love one another as I have loved you” he tells them as they gather one last time to share in the bread and the wine before the morrow.

Of course, his commandment to “Love one another as I have loved” will fall on each one’s ears and will seep into their bones differently just as it falls on each of our own ears and our own bones differently here and now.

For some those listeners, Jesus’ words might call to mind other shared experiences, other shared conversations.

Perhaps some might recall Jesus’ conversation with the fearful Nicodemus, learned but curious rabbi and member of the religious authority but also fearful one who seeks out his counsel by the dark of night.

Perhaps others might recall that spark of filial love between the two as they discuss what it means to be born again, to be of new mind, and new action.

Perhaps still others might recall Jesus’ conversation with the woman at the well, a woman long judged to be an outsider because of both her gender and her ethnicity.

Perhaps what might spring to mind is how the spark of filial love between the two completely changed the woman’s life and how it gave her courage to witness to her faith.

Perhaps we might recall other conversations Jesus had with the likes of Thomas and Peter and even Judas.

From there, we might come to see how Jesus’ ability to meet those ones where they were at with a love that’s broader, deeper, wider than any other experienced before or since.

Jesus, embodiment of God’s relentlessly passionate love modeled for all to have ears to see, hearts to feel, and minds and bodies to respond in all situations an all circumstances is anything but schmaltzy.

Just so, it’s not for the faint of heart.

Indeed, it takes focus, intention, and great courage.

In many ways, the love Jesus commands us to offer as followers in the Way doesn’t make any more sense to us now than it probably did in those days.

In many ways it might seem more like folly than wisdom. But, then, we remember that what we’re talking about here is something so much larger than our own small concerns at work in our lives and in our shared life as community.

Last week in the context of worship we talked about the various threads of streams of ministry that are being lived out in most United Churches.

Let’s think for a minute then how Jesus’ commandment to love one another as

he has loved us might be at work here and now this very day.

For example, I see Jesus' command being lived out in those who bring a word of hope to those who are struggling with ill health or other crises or who are relentlessly willing to say 'yes' to being the hands and feet of Christ in the community.

This is called coming at our faith from a missional perspective.

Then, there's those here this morning who have so intentionally prepared the table for our communion service this day.

They are the ones who are embodying God's love from an ecclesial perspective.

For those who are actively partnering with other organizations and other churches to speak out around social justice issues and environmental concerns, we might say they are coming from an ecumenical perspective.

For those here invested in the liturgy and the music and the prayers for our service, we might say they are coming from a spiritual perspective.

Sometimes the theological stream we in the United Church finding the most challenging to bring to life is the evangelical perspective.

That is, the bearing witness to the good news that the risen Christ is alive here and now and we can't wait to get out

and share that good news with others is what informs their understanding of loving one another as Jesus did.

The good news for today is this: The God of Jesus is a patiently abiding and abundant God who relentlessly pursues us as 24-7, even and perhaps especially so in the midst of hardship, pain, betrayal, despair, and even joy.

Whether we come from a missional, ecclesial, ecumenical, spiritual, or evangelical perspective, whether we experience God in the music, the prayers, the hymns, the stories from the scripture, the sacraments, or the sermon of the day, the good news is this:

God through Jesus is with us and God through Jesus needs us to find our way and to offer our gifts for the sake of healing and wholeness within our walls and beyond its bounds.

Why? Because God knows each one of us alone and together as beloved.

In the name of the risen Christ, allelujah!

Amen!

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