

+ John 13:31-35 + “Jesus Lives” Means Love¹ + 5th Sunday of Easter + 28 April 2013 +

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Since Easter Sunday, we’ve been learning how the phrase “Jesus lives” means not only Christ’s victory over sin and death, but so much more. We’ve seen how it means certainty and power and safety for us as his followers. We’ve seen what kind of impact those two simple words have on our daily lives, but today for us to see what those words, “Jesus lives”, mean, we actually have to go back to the night Jesus was betrayed.

It seems odd to go back to Maundy Thursday evening to join Jesus and his disciples in the Upper Room. After all, we are five weeks into the Easter season. We should be rejoicing because Jesus lives, but the text before us takes us back to the Upper Room, and it’s the right place to be. It’s the right place to be because there we learn that **“JESUS LIVES” MEANS LOVE.**

Jesus and his disciples had gathered in that Upper Room to celebrate the Passover meal one last time. During that meal, Jesus had identified his betrayer, and Judas Iscariot quickly escaped into the night to gather those who would arrest Jesus. The Passover meal was over. Jesus had instituted the Lord’s Supper, and now it was time to teach his final lesson. The disciples listened closely as Jesus spoke to them of how he was going to be glorified very soon. Tenderly Jesus told them, **“My children, I will be with you only a little longer.”** A time was coming when they would no longer be able to sit at Jesus’ feet as students with their teacher. A time was coming when Jesus would return to his heavenly home, but Jesus wasn’t going to leave them alone and empty-handed.

No, he gave them a new command for godly living. **“A new command I give you: Love one another.”** Now very early on in God’s Word, in Leviticus 19 to be exact, God had commanded through his prophet Moses, **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”** That was 1,500 years before, so how could Jesus’ guideline for godly living possibly be new?

Yes, God had commanded us to love each other long ago, but Jesus’ command gives it a new meaning. Something similar has happened on occasion in our daily lives. For example, no matter how old you are, at some point in your life, your mom or dad told you (or will tell you) to “clean up the dishes”. For a kid back in the 1960s or 1970s, that meant you had to take all the dishes off the table, haul them over to the counter, and wash each and every dish by hand in a sink full of warm, soapy water. Personally, I remember it being that way as late as the 1990s, but if you ask just about any kid now to “clean up the dishes”, they’ll think of loading the dishwasher. The command hasn’t changed, but it’s taken on a new meaning.

Or think of shopping. At one time, there was no other way to “go shopping” than by either walking to the store or getting in your car and driving there. Today, though, you can “go shopping” without getting out of bed as long as you have a laptop or a smartphone and an internet connection. Again shopping is still shopping, but with technology, it’s taken on a new meaning.

God had commanded us to love each other long ago, but Jesus’ command gives it a new meaning. That doesn’t mean that the command has changed over time, but the context around the command has changed.

By that Maundy Thursday evening, the disciples had already seen that change taking place as Jesus’ love shone towards them and others. For three years, they had seen his flawless, perfect life—never once giving into temptation—as he perfectly showed love for others. Time and time again they had clearly seen that love demonstrated in the countless miracles he performed to heal and help others.

...But it was that night when they first saw **“the full extent of his love”** (John 13:1). They saw it as Jesus, their Lord and Master, took the position of a servant and washed their filthy feet. They saw it as Jesus instituted his Holy Supper giving himself to them freely for their forgiveness. They saw it as Jesus faced a mob of armed guards and yet showed love to both friend and foe—healing the servant’s ear, allowing himself to be betrayed and arrested, and enabling his disciples to escape unharmed. They saw that love as Jesus endured brutal beatings and awful ridicule though he deserved them not. Jesus’ love allowed Roman soldiers to pound sharp spikes into his hands and feet nailing him to a heavy, wooden cross, even though he could’ve easily rescued himself. They saw that love even when he breathed his last. Jesus’ command to love one another had not changed, but in the cross of Christ, it took on new meaning for his disciples ever after.

¹ Some of the thoughts and language of this sermon were received with thanks from a 2010 sermon by Rev. Aaron Boehm.

“As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” What was this love of which Jesus’ spoke? It’s not the kind of superficial love one expresses for a sports team or clothes or pizza and macaroni and cheese. It’s not the kind of stormy, emotional love of romance. It’s not even the tender love of a parent for a child or a child for a parent, but a different kind of love. It’s *agape* love—love that’s unconditional, selfless, self-sacrificing, and undeserved, love that always puts others first, love that Jesus demonstrated as he suffered and died on a cross for a sinful world. It’s a love that’s unfamiliar and unknown in our self-centered world. You won’t find it on TV or in the movies. It’s not even the first definition for love when you search on Google or Yahoo or in your dictionary.

If anyone has an understanding of that love, it should be us Christians, right? After all, didn’t we just hear St. Paul describe that kind of love in 1 Corinthians 13(:4-7)? **“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”** That’s a Christ-like love. Someone even suggested that we substitute “God” or “Jesus” for “love” in these verses to see what kind of love this is—a perfect, selfless, Christ-like, *agape* love.

...But so often that’s not how my love or your love looks! Is your love always patient when you don’t see things progress like you want or when others don’t do what you expect? Is my love always kind to those who hurt me? Does your love ever envy those who have what you don’t or does your love ever proudly boast of what you’ve accomplished? Being rude and self-seeking comes so easily, but we’re just as easily angered when life doesn’t go our way. How many records of wrongs do you have tucked away in the back of your mind? My love doesn’t always rejoice with truth. Sometimes it’s cowardly and worried and despairing and too quick to give up. Your love and mine fails frequently. Most of the time it doesn’t look like Christ’s love at all!

What’s really sad is when you and I are quick to point out the dreadful lack of love in our world, yet do nothing to fill that gaping hole with our own love. We lament the horrible lack of love for the unborn and the aged, but do nothing to speak up in their defense. We bemoan the rise of divorces or out-of-wedlock pregnancies, but do nothing to help those in such situations. Yes, you and I should understand what Christ means when he says, **“Love one another”**, but we don’t show it. If we do not show it, the world will not see it. If we don’t show it, when and where will such love ever be visible in our world?

The answer is back at that cross and the love of the Savior on that cross, because that love was for you and me too. Standing beneath that cross you and I realize how much we need to look at that cross and see it was our sins of lovelessness that put Jesus there, but it was his selfless, unconditional, undeserved love for you and me that kept him there. It was his love that moved him to sacrifice himself for you and me. Our sad, pathetic mimicking of Christ’s love for our world is forgiven at that cross and in the empty tomb.

You see, Jesus lives, and because he lives, when God looks at you and me, he doesn’t see failed attempt after failed attempt to love others, but instead he sees Christ’s perfect love for you and me as our perfect Substitute. That’s why “Jesus lives” means love—not my love for God and others, but Jesus’ love for you and me that overcame our lovelessness. The apostle John, who wrote our text, elsewhere wrote, **“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us...”** (1 John 4:9-10)

Isn’t that breathtaking? **“God loved us”!** That’s good news. Through that good news of Christ’s love, the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts so we can personally experience that love of Christ. Having then experienced that love, you and I want to share that same love of Christ with others. You can’t keep that love to yourself, because it’s a love that flows from Christ through you to others. There’s no way you can keep that love bottled up inside. That love of the living Christ has changed you forever. You have to share it, and then the world finally gets to see it as Jesus said, **“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”**

So go then, and show others that you are disciples of Jesus. Love them. With that love of Christ, love the person who rubs you the wrong way. With that love of Christ, love the person who isn’t so easy to love. With that love of Christ, love the person who wronged you and the person sitting beside you right now. Then go home, go to work, go to school, go to family and friends, and with that same love of Christ, love the person who could be sitting beside you next Sunday. Love one another, just as Christ so deeply and so dearly loves you, because “Jesus lives” means love. Amen.