

Today is the fifth Sunday of Easter, and as a reminder the Eastertide season carries us from Easter Sunday to Pentecost Sunday. Eastertide intentionally expands the Resurrection celebration, recognizing that Easter is too great of an event to be limited to one Sunday. Eastertide is all about celebrating resurrection, yet the lectionary today returns us to that upper room of the last supper, on Maundy Thursday – the darkened day which leads to the crucifixion – which feels more appropriate for our community this morning. Emotions are too raw for any such celebration. So let us gather back into that upper room for what is perhaps Jesus greatest teaching.

Let us pray.

O God, form the minds of your faithful people into a single will. Make us love what you command, and desire what you promise, that, amid the horrors and tragedies of this world, our hearts are fixed on hope. Inspire us to reach toward your hope this day; through Christ our Lord, amen.

Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another. You should love one another. On yesterday, members within our community, our neighbors, experienced not love, but hate in a racially motivated mass shooting which took place in a supermarket just over a mile from here. Ten lives stolen, innocence lost, on what began as a beautiful Saturday morning, and ended up being one of the darkest days in our city's history.

Our passage today speaks of love, love, love.

There's nothin' you can do that can't be done
Nothin' you can sing that can't be sung
Nothin' you can say, but you can learn how to play the game
It's easy – All you need is love
Nothin' you can make that can't be made
No one you can save that can't be saved
Nothin' you can do, but you can learn how to be you in time
It's easy – All you need is love
There's nothin' you can know that isn't known
Nothin' you can see that isn't shown
There's nowhere you can be that isn't where you're meant to be
It's easy - – All you need is love
Love is all you need.

The Beatles timeless hit, from the gospel of John Lennon. Stated differently than the true Gospel of John, the refrain seems to capture the essence of Jesus final teaching to his disciples. Love is all you need – or at least it is where you must begin, and what one must carry to the end.

Our limited lectionary passage misses the tension in the room which sets the stage for Jesus' teaching. Jesus had just entered Jerusalem on a donkey, almost mocking the empirical power of Rome. As he journeyed into the Holy City he was surrounded by those who believed him to be their Lord, their Messiah, their King. He had instructed his disciples to prepare that upper room where he would host a meal which continues to this day. You know the story, before the meal Jesus washed the disciples' feet – which was really a task for a servant, for a slave – certainly not the task of a king, nor even the host of a meal. Perhaps, for Jesus, he

chose to do this to show that just as he washes away the dirt and grime that clings to the body, he too washes away the sin which seems to cling to the soul. If you recall, it was at this dinner Jesus revealed that he was about to be betrayed by one of the disciples. The other disciples were both shocked and confused: Their Lord had just washed their feet; their king, their messiah told them he would soon die; their leader revealed he was about to be betrayed, by one of them. If that donkey carried hope into Jerusalem, such hope had just escaped that upper room.

Just as hope escaped our community yesterday.

Also leaving the upper room, after the meal, was Judas, who left to betray Jesus and it is within this tension our text opens. The prior text ends by letting us know it was night, there was a darkness that settled into their gathering. And the darkness remained as Jesus, in somewhat parabolic language attempted to lead the disciples to see the good in what was about to take place in his death. Jesus explained, the “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.” And Jesus added, “Little 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.’” I think the disciples were stone faced, they couldn’t follow what Jesus was saying or attempting to say. He had lost them in the darkness when he spoke of his pending death.

Perhaps such darkness is what leads us back to our text for today. Even after the cross, the empty tomb and before God’s full reign on earth as is in heaven, in this in between time darkness continues. Much like the rotation of the earth upon its axis with each day consisting of some darkness and some light, in life we rotate

between dark times and times of light. Like Judas walking out, we know what it is like for one among us to leave the dinner table. Whether a loved one who simply upped and walked away from family, from relationships. Or maybe they didn't leave the table by choice, but like yesterday's victims, life was stolen away leaving an emptiness at the family dinner table. From a theological perspective, we have used the table of Christ to divide more than to unite, even among our Christian siblings. Devoted to our staunch dogma of how Christ is present at the table causes Christian siblings with differing dogmas to walk away, and we feel the need to protect the table with theological fences protecting a table that is not ours to protect. Within that upper room, knowing what was about to take place, Jesus chose to wash all the disciples' feet, with Judas being among them. At the table, Jesus chose to serve bread and cup to all the disciples, knowing Judas had already betrayed Jesus within his heart. And Jesus served him nonetheless.

As Judas left the room, Jesus told of how he, the Son of Man, was to be glorified. Seeing the confused look upon the disciples faces, as confused as a child who is asked "What does love look like?" Jesus laid the parables aside. He laid symbolism aside and poetic language aside, and he met the disciples with some straight talk. Jesus removed as much from the language that could be misinterpreted and he says it more clearly than any gospel records him saying anything else: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another." As one commentator describes, the command "is simple enough for a toddler to memorize and appreciate, and it is profound enough that the most mature believers are repeatedly embarrassed at how poorly they comprehend it and put it into practice."

“By this, everyone will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” It would have been much easier if Jesus would have said it at a different time. If only he could have waited until after his resurrection, when he gathered with those who believed in him. Instead, in the same hour that he washed Judas’ feet, shared his meal with Judas, knowing he was in the process of being betrayed, Jesus said, “Just as I have loved you, you should love one another.” Just as I have loved you... we too must love the Judas within our own lives. To be clear, we need not succumb to his shenanigans, nor chase after him for his acceptance. We can fiercely disagree, even stand against him, but we must stand with love, and love for him. Love one another.

There is also the other part of Jesus commandment, which is no easier. It is the part which states, “Just as I love you.” Which means we must open ourselves to receive love, before we can truly love one another. Sometimes the Judas within us is a far greater threat than the Judas beyond us: The part of self which betrays ourselves, causing us to doubt our own worthiness of receiving love. The parts within us which we prefer to keep our inner darkness hidden away. These are places where Christ longs to reside, for Christ’s love to enter, where light can chase away darkness. “Just as I love you,” Jesus says, “you should also love one another. By this, everyone will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

There is nothin’ you can do that can’t be done.

Nothin' you can do, but you can learn how to be you in time

There's nothin' you can know that isn't known

Nothin' you can see that isn't shown

There's nowhere you can be that isn't where you're meant to be

It's easy, or maybe not so easy. – Yet, all you need is love. Love is all you need.

Through the one who creates, the one who redeems and the one who sustains.

Amen.