

May 2, 2010 John 13:31-35; Acts 11:1-18; Psalm 148; Revelation 21:1-6

“I really only love God as much as I love the person I love the least.” Dorothy Day

Notes:

Length of longest sermon ever preached, as recorded by Guinness Book of World Records: 60 hours + 31 minutes – Can you imagine? Do you think anyone remembered what was said?

Also have the shortest sermon ever preached by an Episcopal priest from Michigan. He stood up and uttered one word, “love,” and then sat down. Of course his congregation said that was the best sermon that he ever gave. (idea, Pastor Edward F. Markquart)

Seriously, it does sum up what Christ is talking about in the gospel of John today. It’s about love and it is commanded by Christ.

Can one be commanded to love?

Lucy and Charlie Brown: Lucy stands with arms folded and a sour expression on her face while Charlie Brown pleads w/her. “Lucy,” he says, “you must be more loving. The world needs love. Make this world a better place, Lucy, by loving someone else.” At that Lucy whirls around angrily and Charlie goes flipping backwards. “Look, you blockhead,” Lucy screams. “The world I love. Its people I can’t stand!” (Lee Griess)

Whether we like people or not, it is hard to think about loving people; and yet, we are commanded to do so.

It’s easy to fail at loving others. All of us have examples in our lives – promises broken, wrong choices made and relationships on edge

And yet, Jesus commands us to love! Maybe it’s not a new commandment – to love one another – not just a recall of Lev. 19:18 – but it’s a new understanding.

No only a commandment, but a gift – Jesus has given us himself – grace – in order to fulfill this commandment through Christ, who not only gave up his life, but gave his life away. He doesn’t expect us to be able to love others on our own – only through him.

We welcome four new families to be members of our church today and I wonder what this passage has to say about that –

Love present w/i a community becomes a part of the community’s witness – those w/i a community of love can go out into the wider community and world to love the neighbor b/c they have it here

B/c love w/i community know that it's not for ourselves alone, but for the sake of the world

Being a part of a worshipping community, a church helps us to focus on being sharers in this new commandment – this new understanding – to love one another

There's a website called 22 words. On it, people are supposed to try and express themselves, in specific categories, in 22 words or less. Can you imagine talking about some of the most important things in your life in 22 words or less? Well, in this gospel, Jesus takes 32 words (in English) to summarize the Christian life – 32 words! (Love one another. . .) It's short. It's that focused. It also brings focus to the disciples, who Jesus is preparing for a life after Easter when he will not physically be with them – the same place that we find ourselves. (Prof. David Lose, Working Preacher)

How do we live that life of love commanded to us by Christ who promises to guide us?

There's a story about a man who got out to his car and found a little boy looking with great admiration at his new vehicle. The little boy asked, "Does this car belong to you?" And the man said, "Yes, in fact, my brother gave it to me for Christmas." What that the little boy's eyes widened. He said, "You mean somebody gave that to you? And you didn't have to pay them for it?" The man said, "That's right. My brother gave it to me as a gift." With that the little boy let out a sigh and the man assumed he was going to say that he wished he had a car like that or he wished someone would give him something that nice. Instead he said, "Wow! I would like to be that kind of a brother. I wish I could give that kind of car to my little brother." (Chicken Soup for the Soul)

It really does come down to the shortest sermon ever recorded, for it is about one thing commanded and gifted by Christ to us and for us – love.