

Fifth Sunday of Easter  
Year C

Acts 11:1-18  
Psalm 148  
Revelation 21:1-6  
John 13:31-35

If you were reading along with me in your Bible as I read the Gospel this morning, you would notice a few words are added by the creators of our lectionary. In the Bible, this passage begins, “After he had gone out, Jesus said...” If I had begun the reading like that, the questions might be who had gone out and from where? Fortunately, we have a little context given. We know that it was Judas who had left the Last Supper.

Much had transpired during that meal. At several points, Jesus had said a blessing before offering food and drink to the disciples. These were common blessings which were given at all meals. However, on two occasions, Jesus instructed those present, “whenever you do this, do this in remembrance of me.” That must have seemed strange to the disciples, but they went along with it. Then, John tells us that Jesus got up and washed the feet of those gathered. As Peter’s objections pointed out, this was highly unusual. Here was their teacher doing the task of a servant. But, for Jesus, this was a teaching moment. He told them He was giving them an example for them to follow.

In both of these instances, Jesus was giving His followers something new to follow. As later theologians pointed out, Jesus instituted the Eucharistic feast which we celebrate every week. He also instructed the disciples in becoming as servants, not as one who would demand people to wait on them. We remember this act each year on Maundy Thursday. But, Jesus was not done. He told those gathered that He had a new commandment for them. These instructions were not enough. He had more for them to learn on this evening. What was this new commandment?

“Love one another as I have loved you.” Throughout the evening, Jesus had been exhibiting this love to His followers, through His words and actions. This was just the final wrap-up of all His teaching throughout the years they had been with Him. This was one of the constant messages of Jesus’ ministry, shown through His care for the oppressed and the disadvantaged.

If Jesus was telling His disciples to love one another and that, through this love, others would know they were His disciples, what does this tell us? Not just within the confines of this gathering here at St. Matt’s, but in the wider church - how are we to interact with others who call themselves Christians?

There are many in this country who call themselves Christian who might disagree with us on many issues. How are we to react to them? Jesus says we are to love them. What about those who seem to take advantage of the poor and dispossessed? Jesus says we are to love them. It is not our responsibility to correct others’ beliefs. We are not called to convince them that their actions and words are contrary to the Word of God. We are to love them. When Jesus told His disciples to love one another and, that by that love, people would know they were His followers,

Jesus knew what would happen in the future. Jesus knew there would be people who called themselves Christians, yet not follow His commands. Our role is to love everyone - friends, fellow Episcopalians, as well as our enemies. It is not to us that the role of judge falls. That is God's job.

We are to love, even as Jesus loved those who crucified Him, even as Stephen prayed for those who stoned him, even as many who, throughout history, have given their lives for others. Love them all - that is what Jesus said. But, especially, we are to love one another.