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Easter 5

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“Love as I Have Loved You”

Text: John 13:31-35

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

**“Love one another.”**

That sounds so simple, doesn't it? But our world is in a crisis of love. For each of us, our mother was the first person to carry us, feed us, and protect us – while we were not yet born – but today some children have to be protected from their mothers. Families – parents and children – do not display the kindness, care, and closeness that God designed and desires for us. Divorce is commonplace, and even expected or assumed when some people get married. Hate is so rampant in our world. We are perhaps more polarized, more isolated, more suspicious of each other, than ever before. . . . What does it mean to **“love one another?”** Is love something that you “fall into” and “fall out of?” Is it that *accidental*? There was a song that came out a number of years ago which said *“What the world needs now is love, sweet love.”* I suppose it will always be that way.

**“Love one another.”**

Jesus spoke those words on Maundy Thursday night. After washing His disciples feet. After identifying the one who would betray Him. After giving the gift of the Lord's Supper. Actually, what Jesus said was somewhat more than that. He said, **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”**

Now on the one hand, this is not really a new commandment. In the Old Testament, back in Leviticus, we already have the command **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”** (Lev 19:18) But notice here that Jesus has changed the wording. He's changed the basis for love. He's made it deeper, broader, and fuller. No longer does Jesus say, **“Love your neighbor as yourself”** but now **“Love one another as I have loved you.”** That's quite different, isn't it! That's a lot more! This is a different love. It is a new commandment – not new, as in altogether different; but new *in nature*.

**“Love one another as I have loved you.”**

One pastor, in commenting on these verses, put it this way: *“Look, if I can't force myself to like Brussels sprouts, watch bowling on television, or put all nine zip code numbers on my envelopes, how am I supposed to love the guy who cuts me off in traffic, the people who talk out loud at the movies, and the child who kicks his dog? How am I supposed to love all the negative, nasty people this world holds?”* (Rev. Ken Klaus, Lutheran Hour Sermon, 5/9/04)

That's a good question, isn't it? But here's a better one: **how are they supposed to love you?** Or me? When we act so negatively and selfishly; when we think the world owes us; when we like to “dish the dirt” on others; when I'm too consumed in helping myself to be bothered with helping others; when I manipulate others by playing hurt until they give in; when I use all the tools in my arsenal to get my own way?

***“Love one another.”***

It's such a simple command. No contingencies. No wiggle room. No loopholes. You do not get to choose who you will love and who you won't. Or who deserves your help and who doesn't. No “I'll love them when they love me first.” Nope. ***“Love one another as I have loved you.”***

That statement, as convicting as it is; as profound as it is; as all-encompassing as it is – shows us also that **love is not accidental**. Love is not something that we “fall into” or “fall out of.” It is not primarily an emotion that comes and goes, so that I may love you one moment, but not the next. It is much more than that. It is deeper than that. It is purposeful. It is an act of the will. And so in a Lutheran marriage ceremony, the bride and groom do not take their vows by saying “I do” – they say “I will.” From this moment on. It is a commitment. A promise. Even when I don't feel like it, *I will*. Even when I don't want to, *I will*. Even when the world tells me to take a better offer, *I will love you*.

That is the love that Christ has given to His bride, the Church. To you and me. A love that is not accidental; that does not come and go; that is not contingent on anything you and I do. Which is good, because we can be pretty unlovable, can't we? Especially in God's eyes, who knows our sin even more than our friends, our spouses, and even ourselves! . . . But He has committed Himself to you. He has promised. I will love you. And He kept His promise. Showing His love, His commitment, to you. The Son of God leaves His throne in Heaven and comes down, to be born into a humble family. He suffers rejection and betrayal, allows Himself to be arrested and abused, and goes to the cross. He is pierced with nails and spear, lashes and thorns. Suffocated by the weight of our sins. Forsaken by His Father. He goes where we cannot go and lays down His life in love for His bride, for He knows that only by His death can His bride live.

And so He says in the Holy Gospel that we heard, ***“Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him.”*** For the love Jesus shows in His life and death shows us the glory of God. Glory that is not self-seeking, but self-sacrificing. Glory that gives Himself that we might live. Glory that shows us what true love really is.

And this One, who has so loved us, now tells us: ***“Love one another, as I have loved you.”***

Now this would be impossible – as we have already thoroughly discussed! – were it up to us. If we were on our own. This is a love we simply do not have and are not capable of! But as Jesus gave this command and showed us this love, so He has also risen from the dead and now alive forevermore, continues to give us this love. And so Jesus is not here commanding the impossible, but rather simply commanding us to *give* what we have *received*.

That’s why it’s important that Jesus gave this command after giving the gift of the Lord’s Supper. For here is where we receive this love from Him. Here we eat the body and drink the blood of our Lord which He gave in love for us, and as we eat and drink in faith, through the forgiveness of our sins we are being conformed, or transformed, into His image. To be like Him. To love like Him. *We are being made new.*

And that’s what we heard Jesus say also in the reading from Revelation. ***“Behold, I am making all things new.”*** And again, that means: not new as in altogether different; but new *in nature*. For this is what happens to us as Jesus, in forgiveness, loves us and gives Himself to us. In Holy Baptism, our old, sinful nature is drowned, and we are **born anew**. As we hear the Word of God and receive our Lord’s forgiveness, our old, sinful nature is slain, and the breath and Spirit of God breathe life into a **new man**. And as we eat and drink the body and blood of Jesus, we feed the new man; we are what we eat; we are **made new**. To be like Him. To love like Him.

And so in order to ***“Love one another,”*** the answer is not to resolve and promise to do better; to be more determined; to *“really mean it this time!”* No, I’m afraid we’ve all been there, done that! The answer is to repent. To stop looking within ourselves for what is not there, and turn to our Saviour, to receive from Him what He wants us to give.

***“Love one another as I have loved you.”***

I read this week (for this Mother’s Day) (Rev. Ken Klaus, Lutheran Hour Sermon, 5/9/04) that what sets the love of a mother apart from other loves is that she believes in her child. Even mothers of murderers and rapists and the worst criminals, beyond all logic, continue to believe in

their son or daughter. Everyone else may have given up and turned their backs on that person, but a mother won't. She believes there is a spark of goodness, some small redeeming quality, *something* – in her child. That tomorrow will be better.

But the love of Jesus is even greater than that – for Jesus, in contrast, held no such beliefs or delusions. He knows our hearts and souls. He knew His disciples would desert Him; His friends would fail Him; His listeners would leave Him. He knew that you and I would let Him down, would go our own way, and that there is not even a small redeeming quality in us. He knew, and that's why He came. That's why the cross. There was no other way. His love would let Him do no less. So we might be saved. So that we might live. That we might have a future in Heaven.

That is His “*I will love you*” love for you. Your Saviour's committed love for you. His love which will never stop loving you. His love which will never stop giving to you. His love which will never leave you for someone better. His love, which His death and resurrection has provided for you for eternity. . . . That is His love that is here for you, that in repentance and faith we receive that love, and thus made new, love one another.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

*(Thanks to the Rev. David Fleming [Concordia Pulpit Resources] for some of the words and thoughts contained in this sermon.)*