

May 2, 2021
Rev. Kerry Smith

John 13:31-35 Catch Your Breath in Times of Loneliness
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

John 13:31-35

New Revised Standard Version

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "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. 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 give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

When my children are fighting, I quote words from this passage. Love one another! Jesus washes the disciples' feet, and gives them a new commandment, that they love one another. "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." It sounds so easy, but there is nothing easy about keeping the commandment to love one another.

This past year of online worship has been really hard. I am so thankful for each one of you here in this sanctuary and so thankful for each of you worshipping online. As we began to pray and plan to come back to worship in this sanctuary, I wondered who would return. There are some folks who may decide that they prefer pajamas to getting dressed up to come to church. There are some folks who may decide that they don't need or want what our church has to offer.

I think about the history of the Christian Church. So many people have been hurt by a witness of hatred and a lack of love. As we have been talking about becoming a dual affiliation church, both UMC and UCC, we have been thinking about the questions of who we want to be, what is our priority and who is our priority as we pray about transforming into what God desires for us to be. Greenland Hills loves all people and stands like a light upon the hill saying, "Here you will find welcome, and we will celebrate who God has called you to be." All belong in this place.

Here at Greenland Hills, our love for each other shows that we are followers of Jesus. But we have to be real that it is not easy for Christians to love one another. In many ways, it is easier to love our enemies because we don't have to deal with them everyday. Jesus washing the disciples feet is a demonstration of love, and it is a reminder for us that community is grounded in love and service.

The chapter that we read, John 13, begins and ends with love. This is how the chapter starts, "Having loved his own who were in the world, Jesus loved them to the end." Jesus loves his disciples to the end, even though Jesus knows one of them will betray him and one of them will deny him. Then, Jesus washes their feet. Jesus wants to show them that love takes form in service. Jesus has shown them what love looks like in practice, and the *one* standard for identifying a Christian: it's not how pure you are, it is not how much you know about the Bible, it's not how holy you are. Love through service is what identifies us as Christians.¹

Jesus shows us how to love, but Jesus' love for us is fully realized at his own death. If Jesus' death is the ultimate act of love, then the love Jesus is calling us to is a giving away of love. It is grace. Jesus' death was an act of fullness, of living out his life and identity fully, even when that living would ultimately lead to his death. Martin Luther King Jr. chose to live the love of Jesus fully. When we listen to sermons from Martin Luther King Jr. near the end of his life, he knew the jeopardy into which his ministry put his life, but he didn't shy away. Living out the love of Jesus was too important. There were no limits on his love. If we love others as much as

¹ Soles, Jaime Clark. *Reading John for Dear Life*.

Jesus loves us, then we love without limits, without boundaries and without restrictions. When in doubt, I want to be someone who errs on the side of compassion, acceptance, love, and service.

The last year has been exhausting, and it only feels like recently are we able to take a deep breath and find peace. Now we have to figure out how to be together again in new ways with fewer hugs and more elbow bumps. Anxiety and depression have increased so much over this last year of isolation. The National Institute of Health and the CDC say that anxiety, depression, trauma, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation is affecting 40% of the adult population. That means nearly one out of every two people that we see is struggling today. Jesus loved radically and calls us to love radically. Loving radically looks to me like reaching out to people to let them know that they are not alone. How can we give of ourselves, our time, our energy, our attention, to help fill up those who are lonely? When we feel lonely, may we let the love of God's people become God's love for us. When we love others, it is God's love being poured out.

Very early on in the pandemic Anna Hosemann-Butler called me. Anna and her husband Ted are a part of Greenland Hills. Anna called to see how I was doing. She said that she was trying to call one friend a day. Sometimes she got busy, but one friend a day was her goal. We talked for fifteen minutes or so, but that conversation and her reaching out had me on a high for at least a week. To know that someone cared enough to call me meant so much.

Karen Post includes a note with her financial offering that she sends to the church. It is a note that radiates love, and caring. Her latest note talked about worshipping in the sanctuary and ended with these words, "the sun will shine through those windows on us again."

One of the greatest gifts Jesus gave his followers was the Christian community and a place to belong, love, and be loved. We are connected to one another by the love of God which is deep and big and rich. Your place in this community matters and the gifts you bring matter. The community is here for you in your time of isolation and loneliness. This community is Christ's love to us in our times of loneliness. We are called to be the Church and love one another as Jesus loved us.

In a few minutes we are going to share in Communion together. One of my favorite thing about being able to give Communion is to call people by name. Katherine, this is the body of Christ given for you. This is the cup of salvation poured out for you. I have been so blessed by still being able to share in Communion in our outdoor worship and today in our sanctuary, but I miss putting a piece of bread in someone's hand, calling them by name, and telling them that Jesus is with them, that they are never alone. We are hungry, we are thirsty, and we want to hear the Gospel that Jesus is with us always, even to the end of the age.² Thanks be to God, Amen.

² <https://sarahbessey.substack.com/p/longing-for-eucharist>