

Sermon Text – Sunday, May 15, 2022 – Pastor Paula Kraus

**First Reading: Revelation 21:1-6, Second Reading: Acts 11:1-18
Scripture: John 13:31-35 – Glory to God**

What we've just read is what happens immediately after Jesus washes the feet of the disciples, including Judas' feet, on the evening he was betrayed. Judas is the one who has gone out, to do quickly what he has set out to do on that evening. Jesus' statement following Judas' departure is that "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him." I wonder what he means by that.

This is the beginning of Jesus' farewell discourse to his disciples. Jesus reminds them of what will transpire, "Where I am going you cannot come" and "In my father's house are many rooms, I am going there to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). These are words spoken to those who are closest to Jesus. He knows what is coming and these words are spoken to comfort them although they won't realize any of that until the events of the next three days take place. So, as Judas leaves the room the events that lead to Jesus' death and glorification begin. Jesus speaks as if what will happen has already happened and that is confusing, but for us, reading this scripture today, it is truth.

Jesus obedience to God, his father, that leads to crucifixion, burial, and resurrection is what glorifies God. God's glory is revealed through the obedience of Jesus in his life and death. Jesus is glorified through his obedience to the father, even unto death. Jesus' resurrection reveals glory to God in the defeat of Satan and death overturned.

Jesus makes this statement three times, "Love one another" and claims to give them a new commandment. But loving one another isn't really a new commandment for Jesus, he establishes that commandment when the Pharisees asked him about the greatest commandment – see Matthew 22:39, Mark 12:33 and Luke 10:27. Loving our neighbor is the basic premise behind loving one another and, along with loving God, the cornerstone of all the commandments set down in the Torah or Mosaic Law.

The newness of this commandment is obvious when Jesus states, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." Jesus shows the disciples a different type of love, a love that puts others first, a love that is reflected when we serve others. Jesus shows them as he shares the bread and cup and washes the feet of even his betrayer. So, after showing them what that type of love looks like, he reminds them "love one another." This is the new covenant of love established as Jesus sacrificially gives of himself for them, for others, for us.

This is God's covenant of love which binds us to God and one another. Jesus, in his farewell discourse covered over the following three chapters in John, outlines the promises God makes to them and consequently to us. The few verses we read this morning from Revelation also remind us of God's promises in this 'new covenant'. There will be a new heaven and new earth, God is making all things new and it started with Jesus. "All things are made new by the presence of Christ: a new heaven, a new earth, a new way to love one another through his example."¹ That is why we praise God in response.

In this covenant of love we are joined together in discipleship and bonds of Christian faith, sound familiar? Those words are from the Preamble to the Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and spoken this morning as an affirmation of faith in our call to worship. Why is that important? We are a church of the covenant and it is important to our faith that we know what that means and respond appropriately. In legal terms, covenant means a binding agreement between two parties, it's a two-way promise. But unlike a contract which is more forceful and by nature includes penalties, a covenant is binding because it is for the mutual benefit of the agreeing parties. In modern times we would consider a covenant more of a spiritual agreement rather than a legally binding contractual arrangement.

There are several 'covenants' we are familiar with from Old Testament times, the covenant God makes with Noah – to never again destroy the earth and symbolized by a rainbow. The covenant God makes with Abraham that his children would become a great nation. The Mosaic Covenant between God and the nation of Israel that is characterized within the Torah. Then there is the Davidic Covenant where God promises that a king from the line of David would reign eternally in God's kingdom. This new covenant that Jesus tells his disciples of and that we remember symbolically at our time of communion, assures us that everyone who does not resist the 'continual' drawing of the Holy Spirit on their hearts will be drawn to Jesus through repentance and faith, reconciled to God, and forgiven of their sins.

With the exception of the promise God makes to Noah and Noah's family, each of these covenants come with a caveat. Abraham's children will become a great nation through Abraham's faith in God, the nation of Israel will flourish as God's chosen people if they obey the laws set forth in the Torah, and David's line

¹ Helsel, Carolyn B. "Fifth Sunday of Easter: Connecting the Reading to Scripture: John 13:31-35." *Connections A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year C. Volume 2: Lent through Pentecost*. Green, Joel B., Long, Thomas G., Powery, Luke A., and Rigby, Cynthia L. Westminster John Knox. 2018. pp. 262-263. Print.

will reign on Israel's throne forever as they remain faithful to the one true God. We too have a caveat in this new covenant that Jesus established. If we confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, and proclaim him Lord and Savior of the world – then we shall become children of God and shall have eternal life in God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

That is what we do as Christians, and the affirmation of faith that we recited this morning begins with that phrase – our faith rests solely on that claim. That said, what does it really mean for us to claim to be a church of the new covenant – which is what the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) claims to be. That is something we should probably take time to understand since that is the foundation of our beliefs.

Think about – why are we a church – what is it about this gathering of people from different walks of life that makes us a church? We know when this 'church' was established, and we have some knowledge of the people who have worshiped here over the years, our past Pastors and those who have left us with a lasting legacy. At some point however something started here, on this very spot, that didn't exist prior to some people getting together.

The answer to that can be found in the first paragraph of the Preamble we recited this morning. "As members of the Christian Church, we confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and proclaim him Lord and Savior of the world." Out of that belief and that confession a church was established at the corner of South Keystone Avenue and Lincoln Street.

And contained in that same 'Preamble' or affirmation of faith are these words, "We rejoice in God, maker of heaven and earth, and in God's covenant of love which binds us to God and to one another." We are bound to one another because of love; because of Jesus' new commandment to "Love one another." That is what makes us a church, a congregation – worshiping together out of love for one another to bring glory to God. Being a church in covenant means we willingly bind ourselves to God and to one another, in discipleship and in obedience to Christ, in the bonds of Christian faith. These are all words taken from the Preamble to the Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

I think because we choose to worship together, no one is forced or coerced to join this congregation, that there are things we must do in response to this 'covenant of love.' Jesus makes this statement in the scripture we read this morning, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." But, this covenant extends beyond the local congregation, we are also covenantally bound to Disciple congregations throughout the region of West Virginia and

Pennsylvania and throughout North America and Canada which is the extension of the general expression of our church. We work together to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the communities where we live, we support the district and the region with offerings of time and money. Because we are 'made one with the whole people of God' we recognize a commitment to see the church flourish, not only locally but also in all areas of the globe.

So you may think, that's fine but what do we get from that, what is in it for us to be in covenant with the district, the region, and the general church? The advantage is the reach we have because of this covenant, we can serve God in all parts of the globe because of the presence of the ministries of the general expression of the church. Where there is war, where there are natural disasters anywhere on the globe where God's people are suffering – this church is there – you are doing God's work around the globe through your donations to the special offerings. In addition, because of the covenantal relationship in our region you can know that if there is a need right here in this church or this community help will come, the church supports its own. That is what being bound in covenant means.

Then there is the advantage you have because of the support your Pastor receives from this covenantal relationship. My standing as a minister is affirmed by the regional and general church. Additionally, as I seek ordination, you can be assured that I meet all the qualifications set forth by the general expression of the church for ordained ministers because I have gone through a process of vetting including oral interviews. This means I have completed the appropriate courses of study and that what I am preaching and teaching you comes from a sound biblical foundation. Anyone who seeks a calling to ministry within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) churches will be vetted by the regional and general churches to ensure their fitness for ministry – in that way you can be assured they too believe what you believe – that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and is Lord and Savior of the world. Would you want it any other way?

When we hear from Jesus – Love one another, as I have loved you, you must also love one another we are reminded of this new covenant of love and our bonds of Christian faith and we respond to that covenant with praise and thanksgiving.