

## **“Love: One to Another”**

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

John 13:31-35

May 2, 2010

You have heard the expression “You can’t see the forest for the trees.” It is an expression used to point out that sometimes we become so caught up in the details we miss the big picture; we miss the point. When one studies the Bible and consistently seeks to resolve every question, every detail, the big picture can be lost. In our desire to have the answer we can miss the point of the story. We can’t see the forest for the trees.

In my years of studying the Bible has revealed many things. I wonder sometimes, that in my quest to know the answer if I have missed some important points, some valuable information, if I haven’t lost sight of the big picture. Sometimes the answers are obvious, simple, and yet we miss them. I am not sure why it happens, only that it does happen. I bring this to your attention because of its connection with our lesson.

For whatever reason, God has made a special covenant (promise) with the people known as Israel. Why God chose them and not some other people we will never know. Why God singled them out and made them special, I don’t think anyone really knows. Yet, that is precisely what God has done. To dwell on the whys and wherefores can lead us to miss the point of God dealing with Israel in the first place.

What we do know is that God’s relationship became the place to show the world the kind of love we can expect from God. God’s relationship with Israel showed the world the staying power of love. God never stopped loving Israel. The covenant was a promise kept. God committed to be Israel’s God and history shows that commitment never faltered. The Old Testament is punctuated with Israel’s faithlessness but God’s faithfulness. The Old Testament is filled with stories of self-serving acts but none done by God. For whatever the reason God bound God-self to Israel in love. Israel had a special place in God’s heart. Because of that, God’s presence would be known through the people of Israel.

As John wrote his gospel he wrote to people who were skeptical about the Christian’s relationship with God. Was the relationship the disciples had with Jesus on the same level as the relationship Israel had with God? John’s answer was a very clear “yes!” What had begun with Abraham, carried on through the judges, kings, seen in the prophets, was now being carried forth in and through those who call themselves Christian. This accomplished two things: It accomplished showing Jesus was the Son of God; and it accomplished the fact that the church was the continuation of the presence of God in our world (as Israel had been earlier).

God movement in people’s lives is because God chooses to move about in people’s lives. This movement, if history is of any help, is unmotivated by selfish desires. The love of God is open and given to all regardless of reputation. Even people coming to faith are further evidence of God’s love. We see people changing their attitudes and values due to the evidence of God’s presence. God’s love seeks to build people up, enable relationships to grow. God’s presence is among us and when people come into contact with believers they come into contact with God.

John was aware of God’s commitment and recorded it for us to read. The covenant made hundreds of years earlier was now manifested through Jesus’ disciples. The impact of this bond was so significant

that people would take notice. The bond would be so genuine that questions would be asked as how could this be? These questions opened the door for movement of God in their lives. This movement showed itself in acts of love – one to another. These acts are so much part of God's presence that they form the criteria in determining God's presence.

Due to Christ's life, death, and resurrection God's love has been made known as never before. Knowledge and intimate contact with God would be the rule of the day. This love affects people by bringing them salvation. The love affects them by binding people together as one just as Israel and God were one.

The dynamic of love that was vertical (God to Israel) was now to be demonstrated horizontally (one to another). We begin to see that because what Jesus did through love is given to us to do. Not in the sense of obligation but in a sense of gift. God's love in Jesus would be given to the disciples so they could love each other as God loved them. God's love in Jesus was given so their acts of love, one for another, would become evidence to the world of God's presence. In this sense it was new.

What does this all mean to us? If we spend too much time trying to figure out Noah's Ark, if it is on Mt. Ararat, if the shroud of Turin is real, or if Jesus said this or that, we might just miss the whole point (forest for the trees). God gives us the Holy Spirit. This gives us God's love. Their gift of love moves about in our hearts and then moves us to acts of love. These acts of love, motivated by God become the evidence of God's presence in our world. As long as there are believers there will be acts of love. Our response to God leads to love one another. We live out Jesus' command and more importantly we provide the means for people to be encountered by God.

Let us love one another. Let us do it in response to God and let it be done to the glory of Christ.

AMEN