

“By This We Will Know: The Dance of Love”

Our Gospel Reading reports an important monologue Jesus had with 11 of his original disciples on his last evening before his arrest, interrogation, torture, execution, and death. What had already taken place that night was extraordinary – his last meal with them and his washing of their feet. **However, Jesus’ focus on the welfare and the relationships of his followers on that evening was near miraculous by itself.** Since few of us relish thinking about the last mortal night of our Savior, it is easy for our eyes to glaze over and for us to let Jesus’ words in verse 31 to go over our heads. However, what Jesus said in that opening verse of our Scripture provided the defining context for the meaning and importance of that evening for us and all of humanity. John reported, *“After Judas had left, Jesus said, ‘Now the Son of Man’s glory is revealed; now God’s Glory is revealed through him. And if God’s Glory is revealed through him, then God will reveal the glory of the Son of Man in himself, and he will do so at once.’”*

Let’s take a moment to consider what all of Jesus’ talk of glory was about. We are tempted to think of “glory” as being about our living in the spot light – receiving recognition, praise, prestige, dominance, and influence. Yet, the “glory” Jesus was talking about was self-giving, instead of self-centered. He had already provided a powerful expression of the “glory” he was referring to when he had washed the disciples’ feet over Peter’s objections and then told them to follow his example and “wash one another’s feet” – meaning – serve one another. The “Glory” of God shown in Jesus was and is self-giving and sacrificial agape love. That is the example we are invited to participate in and called to follow for our own welfare. **Agape love is the dance of the True Life – New Life in Jesus Christ!**

As Margaret quoted earlier, the drummer of the Grateful Dead, Mickey Hart, wrote: “To fall in love is to fall in rhythm.” We fall in agape love when we fall in sync – in rhythm – join the dance – with Jesus’ New Life of that same agape love. Marcia McFee, the creator of the concept of this Dare to Dance Agape Worship Celebration Series, has said, “It is love for each other by which we know we are followers of Jesus, the ever-attentive shepherd. In the face of societal rules and attitudes that strive to foster ‘everyone for themselves,’ they will know we are Christians by our love.”

McFee was alluding to the conclusion of our Scripture when Jesus said to his 11 remaining disciples in **verses 34-35**, *“And now I give you a new commandment: agape love one another. As I have agape loved you, so you must agape love one another. If you have agape love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples.”* Strangers will recognize we are followers of Jesus Christ, if we “have agape love for one another”!

So, how do folks in the world perceive us followers of Jesus? Alan Brehm has said, “it is unfortunate that the church doesn’t have a very positive image in our culture. I think if you set up a kiosk at Baybrook Mall and interviewed people who don’t go to church, you’d be disappointed at what they had to say about those of us who do go. There are a lot of people out there who have been burned by church people at some point in their lives. Some of them might say that we who go to church are hypocrites, overlooking our own sins while we sharply criticize the sins of others. Others might point out how church people are always fighting with each other over the most insignificant things.” Brehm continued, “Unfortunately, most of what I think you’d hear wouldn’t be the full story. There are plenty of people in church who practice the compassion and mercy of Christ on a daily basis.” Brehm concluded, **“But sadly, that doesn’t translate into the perception most people have about us.”** (“Tough Love” by Alan Brehm on thewakingdreamer.blogspot.com)

The following “Refuse to Dance” video includes the description of some of the types of experiences Glennon Doyle Melton has experienced. [THE “REFUSE TO DANCE” VIDEO was shown.] Marcia McFee pointed out, “When we meet together as God’s beloved community, we rejoice that we are forgiven for every iniquity we have done or will ever do. We are called to truly love and accept one another as Christ loved and accepted us.” McFee concluded, **“This interview segment with Glennon Doyle Melton reminds us to join in the dance of forgiveness and grace.”**

Rev. Dr. Janet H. Hunt has shared her experience during one of her Confirmation Class sessions. They were focusing on the “petition of the Lord’s Prayer where” they “pray, ‘Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.’” Hunt explained, “To bring the learning home, one of the exercises we shared in was that of remaking a video. We viewed this short clip of ‘Signs of Forgiveness,’ we handed out cardboard and markers, and we asked

them to make their own signs. Then in their small groups they filmed themselves with their signs, emulating what they had seen in the video. Only, of course, what they wrote on their signs was personal for each of them.” Hunt continued, “It went pretty well. The conversations were meaningful and thoughtful. Yes, some of them took it more seriously than others. To be sure, as you can imagine, some took it so seriously they found they could not fully participate, for their pain was too fresh.

I have to say I was knocked over when I walked in to observe our 7th graders. One had scrawled on his sign, ‘You told me I ought to kill myself.’ And then he flipped it over, ‘But I forgive you.’”

In conjunction with that experience and our Scripture, Hunt shared some of her insights, “While God’s people are always called to care for those who are not part of the community, we are also called to care for one another. It is tough out there.” Hunt asked, **“What does it look like for us to love each other in the world so that the world might indeed recognize the One we follow?”**

Hunt elaborated, “I responded on Sunday night by talking to our kids about bullying. I spoke of my own experience at the hands of a couple of my classmates. Yes, I spoke about taking the long view – for these decades later it is clear that I more than survived. While it felt like it would never end then, 7th grade did not last forever. More than that, I talked about how they might take care of and look out for and stand with each other out there in the world. And about how one of the ways we do that if we can see no other way is to tell someone who can help. We brainstormed for a moment about who we should tell should it happen to us. Mostly, I simply wondered with them about how we might be called to love each other.” (“If We Have Love For One Another” by Rev. Dr. Janet H. Hunt, *Dancing with the Word*, 2013.)

It is very important, especially for our children and youth and anyone else who is vulnerable, for us to agape love one another – stand with and for one another while in the middle of problems and difficulties! Our Worship, Study, Service, and Fellowship Activities provide us many opportunities to be agape loving, forgiving, supporting, and comforting of one another. Yet, I don’t believe Jesus wanted his disciples to just agape love one another. As Jesus said in his teachings in other gospels, we are to agape love our neighbors and even our enemies! Further, our agape love for one another and for other persons is not merely saying we agape love but actually living that loving action for others! The death of Barbara Bush, former First Lady, brought to my remembrance how she had visited and touched babies and adults with AIDS during the days when most people treated them as lepers. That was an act of love for others.

In 1 John 3:16-18, the author emphasized the importance of putting our agape love into actual action, instead of mere words. John wrote, ***“This is how we know what agape love is: Christ gave his life for us. We too, then, ought to give our lives for others! If we are rich and see others in need, yet close our hearts against them, how can we claim that we agape love God? My children, our agape love should not be just words and talk; it must be true agape love, which shows itself in action.”***

Strangely enough, it is in the Worshipping Community – the Church that we have many opportunities to agape love one another as followers of Jesus Christ, as well as, agape love guests – others, who have in some cases, experienced the same type of rejection lived by Glennon Doyle Melton.

Kathryn Matthews explained we are to be an Extravagantly and Radically Welcoming Community, when she said, “Like Jesus, we want to provide a space where all are welcome. The flock is open-ended, not closed. Jesus owns up to having ‘others’ that he cares about, too, and remembering that nurtures in us a whole new perspective on hospitality. It’s more than a warm welcome to worship and a cup of coffee downstairs afterward (although those are very good things). Hospitality is difficult; it tests us. It calls, even pushes, us out to our growing edges.” (“Love in Truth and Action” by Kathryn Matthews on Weekly Seeds)

We, this local congregation of followers, will be known – recognized as Christian as we put into practice our agape love for one another, as we welcome others into this agape loving community of believers, and as we actively reach out to agape love all people! Amen.