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Key Verse: John 13:31b-35

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."

The Reflection:

As we leave behind the cheering crowds and celebration of Palm Sunday and continue our journey with Jesus to the cross, we eventually arrive at Maundy Thursday. Here we witness an intimate meal where Jesus once again reminds his disciples that the core of his mission is love.

The mood has shifted from triumphant to tender, and the public acclaim has transformed into intimate instruction. Though Jesus is keenly aware of everything that's about to occur - the betrayal by Judas, the denial by Peter, and the agony of the cross - his focus is not on self-preservation, revenge, or even fear. His focus is on love.

Jesus tells his disciples, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified." This "glory" Jesus refers to is not the worldly glory of today which is often acquired through achievement, influence or power. Rather, the glory Jesus speaks of is the glory of humble, sacrificial, radical love, and he illustrates this through a new command. Jesus instructs his disciples to love one another as he has loved them. In doing so, Jesus is preparing them to navigate life without his physical presence, and he tells them that the love they pour into others will become their "calling card" to a watching world.

The words of Jesus are not casual or abstract - they are urgent, yet practical.

They are not spoken in a time of ease, but in a time of deep crisis.

And above all else, his command to love provides no list of acceptable exclusions, because Christ-like love crosses borders of comfort, convenience, culture and conflict.

I don't know about you, but I feel fairly confident in my ability to dispense the "warm hugs and comforting casseroles" kind of love. However, the "turn-the-other-cheek, all-inclusive" kind of love Jesus asks of me feels a bit more daunting. It also feels rather scarce in a culture that far too often confuses strength with dominance.

Christ-like love looks more like humility and selflessness, and less like power and control.

Christ-like love is merciful and compassionate, striving for unity and reconciliation.

Christ-like love welcomes rather than excludes, and it compels us to pursue and defend justice.

Jesus embodied this type of love when he repeatedly crossed lines others refused to cross. He spoke with the Samaritan woman others avoided. He touched lepers no one would come near. He dined with tax collectors despised by their neighbors. He defended a woman condemned by hypocrites. He praised the faith of a Roman soldier employed by the army brutalizing his people, and he lovingly offered forgiveness to the very people responsible for his execution.

This kind of radical love doesn't come easily, and it rarely springs from warm, fuzzy "feelings." Instead, it's often the result of a conscious, deliberate, and sometimes difficult "choice" to honor and obey Jesus by loving like he loved.

I invite you to consider a few questions. What might happen if we not only viewed Easter as a celebration of Christ's resurrection, but also as an invitation to honor our Savior's sacrifice by reflecting him to the world around us? What might happen if we intentionally chose to love like Jesus - beyond comfort, across divides, when it costs us something, and when it would be easier, and perhaps more conventional, not to? How might this kind of love impact a hurting and broken world?

The people who cross our paths - family members, coworkers, neighbors, even strangers - are not accidents. They are sacred opportunities where we can honor Jesus by choosing to love like he did.

As we move toward Easter morning where we will reverently stand in the light of a love that held nothing back, may we remember that Jesus didn't simply speak about love - he embodied it, he poured it out, and then he entrusted it to us.

The Prayer:

Loving Father, we are humbled by Your infinite mercy and love. Set our hearts on fire with a longing to love like Jesus. When loving others this way feels too uncomfortable, too costly, or too inconvenient, gently remind us of the lavish love Jesus displayed for us on the cross, and then empower us to love freely - with a love that leaves no room for exceptions, exclusions or conditions. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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