

Eating with the Enemy

April 24, 2016

John 13:31-35

“I give you a new commandment,” Jesus tells his disciples, *“that you love one another.”* This sounds like the required sibling make-up kiss.

Siblings are fighting. The parent has had enough. “Tell your brother you’re sorry! Give your sister a hug. Tell your brother you love him. Kiss your sister and make up.”

Such apologies taste like dust and ashes. Such hugs feel like embracing pond scum. Such kisses burn like battery acid.

The word “commandment” causes us to bristle with resistance. Even worse, Jesus commands us to love these incredibly unlovable people. Worst of all, it’s not just warm fuzzies. It’s foot washing! Somehow, this is what the Kingdom of God looks like.

Seriously, Jesus?

“Love one another.” When people describe the Jesus Way, this where they start. Three simple words—Love one another. No complicated confessions. No difficult dogmas. No mind-muddling mysteries. Just love one another. It’s so simple even a child can do it.

Simple, however, is rarely easy. Now is the time to look at the events that lead to our gospel reading. Jesus has just predicted his betrayal. Judas is there at the table. Judas eats the bread along with the rest of Jesus’ disciples. Then he departs to do his dirty deed. In the next paragraph, Jesus predicts Peter’s threefold denial.

Jesus is eating with the Enemy.

Not quite so easy, is it? We live in the Era of Enemies. Everyone is out to get us, to pick our pockets, to use our bodies, to abuse our trust, to enslave our minds. Everyone has a hidden agenda, and it’s never good. Trust no one. Fear everyone. Hurt others before they hurt you.

This is the tenor of our age. Jesus says, “Love one another.” Who does he think he’s kidding?

Jesus is not, however, issuing commands here. These are words of comfort. *“I will not leave you alone,”* he says to his disciples in John fourteen. I will give you another Comforter. I will give you my presence and my peace to keep you together. I will show you where I am going so you can know the way.

We are not on our own. We are vessels, channels, conduits for Jesus’ love. We don’t have to muster this up on our own. We just need to get out of the way. In this Easter season we confess that we are not alone in our loving. In Romans five, verse five, Paul reminds us, *“God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”*

I point to that verse in particular because of what comes after it. In verses six through eleven, Paul describes the moments when the Holy Spirit works in us. While we were still weak, Christ died for the ungodly. While we

were sinners, Christ died for us. While we were still enemies we were reconciled to God through Jesus' death. This is what happens when Jesus eats with the enemy.

Jesus is eating with the enemy. Today.

Jesus, however, is no party-crasher. The Holy Spirit takes no hostages. God invites us to the table but will not kidnap us. "*Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking,*" Jesus says in Revelation three, verse twenty, "*if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.*" When we come to Holy Communion, we open that door.

Every Sunday, Jesus is eating with enemy. And in that meal, he transforms us once again into his friends and followers.

"*I give you a new commandment,*" Jesus tells his disciples, "*that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.*" This is not the required sibling make-up kiss. Loving one another is not our duty. It is our destiny. And it is our delight!

Loving one another doesn't get us into God's Kingdom. Instead, loving one another is what happens when God's Kingdom gets into us.

When people are confirmed in our tradition, they answer a simple question. "Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in Holy Baptism?" That continued living has five parts: to live among God's faithful people, to hear the Word of God and share in the Lord's Supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

Those promises are not a loyalty oath we swear when we graduate from church. These promises are the shape of loving one another. They are the five dimensions of resurrection living. They are not what it takes to get into church. They are what life is like when church gets into us.

"*I will not leave you orphaned,*" Jesus repeats in John fourteen, verse eighteen. That is true for us. This is what Jesus does through us. We are the church, the body of Christ. We do not shoot our wounded. Instead, we stay with them and tend to them. We are a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints.

The Holy Spirit always expands this circle of care. If we can't bring ourselves to love the least, the lost and the lonely, then the Holy Spirit will outrun us. The Holy Spirit will convert unbelievers and embrace enemies while we are protecting our borders.

We read today's gospel on the downhill side of the Easter season. We read it today so we won't be surprised by the challenge of loving one another. Loving one another is not the prelude to loving our enemies. Loving one another is *the same thing* as loving our enemies. This is true for Jesus, and it is true for us.

Jesus is eating with the enemy, and making us friends.

May the Holy Spirit empower us for just such love in Jesus' name! Let us pray...

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