

Sermon May 19th, 2019

Jesus Leaves Us with a Key to the Kingdom

Judas Iscariot has just left the meal to go and tell the authorities where Jesus is. Jesus knows he is about to be arrested and killed, and so, needs to say goodbye to his friends. Today's gospel is the beginning of his goodbye speech that will carry us through the next three chapters of John's account of Jesus.

Two sayings of Jesus stand out for me in this part of his speech that we hear this morning. First, Jesus says, "where I am going, you cannot come." Now, for the disciples who devoted the last three years of their lives to follow Jesus, I wouldn't be surprised if what Jesus is saying hurts them profoundly. "What do you mean we can't follow you anymore? We gave up everything. We love you. What will we do now?"

Saying goodbye to someone we love hurts. Whether it is through death, or through moving away, or through divorce/breakup. Saying goodbye to someone we love hurts. Especially if we have invested a lot of our time and energy into this relationship.

We want to come. We want to keep following. Whether it is clinging to our belief that one day we will reunite with our loved one in the midst of our grief. Looking at their picture daily to remember that they are still a part of us. Or later deciding to move to where our loved one moved. How many people move to be closer to their grandchildren? Or in situations where forgiveness and reconciliation are possible we do whatever we can to try and reconcile the relationship we lost. Therapy, mediation, flowers.

We often miss the people we say goodbye to. They impact our lives in a big way, and the void they leave behind is sometimes so hard to overcome. So, as we hear our gospel this morning, we grieve along side the disciples as Jesus says goodbye.

The second saying that stands out for me is when Jesus says, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." So, on one hand the disciples cannot follow Jesus where he is going, at least for now. On the other hand, Jesus has spent the last three years dedicating much time and energy into mentoring the disciples showing them how to love as Jesus loves. Showing them how to love as God loves.

Jesus leaves behind his teachings, his memory, his legacy so that the ministry can continue. Or in other words, Jesus has given them the keys to keep the ignition of the kingdom of God going in this world.

The people we say goodbye to in our lives often leave us with something to hold onto. Something that keeps that person or their vision alive for us. Like a teaching or a precious memory of their love for us, or chromosomes and personality traits. Depends how close the relation is. So, as we hear our gospel this morning, we are comforted along side the disciples, hopeful that Jesus leaves us with something to keep Jesus' presence and vision alive for us.

And what Jesus leaves us with is his example of love that he invites us to follow. His example that we learn about in the gospels, the apostles and epistles writings, and through those who interpret these words for us.

Jesus invites us to love one another as he loves us. This is the key to experiencing heaven on earth. Or in other words, to experiencing the Kingdom of God that Jesus proclaims throughout his ministry.

All we need to do is love one another as Jesus loves us. If we do this then we keep Jesus' teachings, Jesus' memory, Jesus' legacy alive for us. If we do this our world is a much better place to live in as people experience the kingdom of God.

Unfortunately, like the disciples, like all those who came after the disciples, we struggle to love as Jesus loves. We struggle to reflect the Kingdom of God in our world.

If we look at our own experiences of saying goodbye we see how challenging it can be for us to carry on someone's teachings, someone's memory, someone's legacy. Sometimes thinking about the person hurts too much. Sometimes our anger over the break down of the relationship makes it difficult for us to remember the good. Sometimes circumstances make it difficult for us to keep connected to those who have moved away.

When we look back on Jesus' ministry we see that at times Jesus' love challenges us. Jesus' love pushes us to the margins of our society. Jesus' love moves him to listen to people that many others rejected. Jesus' love moves him to show compassion not judgment for those living in poverty. In a system that taught people that those who were poor deserved their lot.

Jesus' love moves him to forgive in circumstances where we couldn't imagine forgiving. Jesus' love moves him to love others even when his life was threatened. Jesus' love moves mountains, but also, is challenging for us to follow.

It isn't easy to love one another as Jesus loves us. But, through the gift of the Holy Spirit that we receive in the waters of baptism we are capable of loving people in this way. The church has reflected this love at times throughout its history, and it has really made a difference in people's lives.

So, we have the potential to keep Jesus' teachings, Jesus' love alive. We have the potential to give people an experience of the kingdom of God.

For the disciples, on the day of Pentecost Jesus breathes on them the Holy Spirit so that they can reflect Jesus' love in their lives. In the story in the book of Acts we heard this morning, Peter is challenged to put his judgments aside and love the Gentiles as Jesus loves him changing that household through his hospitality. Watching as the Holy Spirit comes to them.

For us, we witness this love impacting our world when we show hospitality to our Muslim friends or when we share of our abundance with others in need or when we offer compassion and support for those who are impacted by mental health problems. Jesus' teachings live on.

When we say goodbye, it doesn't have to be the end. As we hear in our reading in the book of Revelation this morning, we experience a new beginning. Through God's love for us, we are renewed living our lives, impacted by the teachings, memories, and legacy our loved ones leave with us. And even though we may not be able to come today. One day we will reunite with those we love including the God who loves us and longs to dwell with us.

Jesus left us with a great legacy, a great memory, a great teaching, a key to the Kingdom of God. And the key is to love one another as he has loved us. May we keep his teachings alive. May we love one another as Jesus loves us changing people's lives. Giving people an experience of the kingdom of God. Creating a world where forgiveness, reconciliation, hospitality, peace, and compassion are at the core of everything we know and do.

Let us pray, loving God, we give thanks for your Son who taught us to love like you. Help us, encourage us, to love, to give people an experience of your Kingdom come. Give us hope that in all our relationships where we have had to say goodbye that you breathe new life into us. Helping us keep their memories, their teachings alive. Giving us hope that one day we will reunite with them in a world where you dwell among us. A world that is healed from all suffering and brokenness. In Jesus name we pray, **Amen.**