

Acts 11:1-18  
Psalm 148  
Revelation 21:1-6  
John 13:31-35

Easter 5C  
St Thomas, Medina  
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### Last Words

During the last few days before my son Simon headed off to college in Boston, I remember having a great sense of urgency because the time we had left together was so short. I wanted to look at him, to be with him, to listen to him, to drink him in. And while I knew I would miss him, my heart's desire was to send him off with everything he needed... to say everything that mattered. *Remember to look at the beauty around you. Remember that you have everything you need. Remember to make space for quiet so you can hear what you know and what you think. Remember that I love you more than breathing.* When we know someone is leaving, all the unimportant stuff falls away and we're left with only what's precious and essential.

And that's the place we find Jesus and his friends in today's Gospel reading. The story takes us back to the night when they all shared that last supper together, the night Jesus was betrayed, the night he washed their feet, the night he gave them the new commandment. Jesus knew he was going to die. He knew it was his last chance to tell them everything they needed to know. So what did he tell them? He told them the only thing that really mattered. He told them to love one another.

He'd said that before, but on that last night, he called it a "new" commandment. It wasn't that the loving was new, it wasn't. *What was "new"* was the invitation to enter into the same love Jesus shared with the Father, a love so boundless that it wrapped all of creation in its embrace, a love so sure it would lay down its life, a love so strong not even death could overcome it. What was "new" was the incarnate source of love. God incarnate in Jesus, and God incarnate in the disciples too. When Jesus told them to love one another, it was so they could become HIS presence, visible to the world through their loving. *That's how they'll know you belong to me,* Jesus told them. *Love one another.*

It seems simple, doesn't it? Jesus didn't rattle off 50 or 25 or even 10 commandments that last night. There was just the one thing. Love one another – that's how they'll know you are mine.

But we don't always seem to get that. There are so many other things we grab hold of to identify ourselves as Christians. We point to right thinking in creeds and doctrine, we pick and choose scripture passages that support our way of living in the world, we insist that only particular ways of worship are worthy of God, we say who's in and who's out based on -well - whatever it is we base it on. But Jesus didn't say the mark of his followers was what they think, or the beauty of their worship, or way that they pray. He didn't even say it was because they believed in him. He said the world would know we belong to him by the way we behave. *They will know,* he said, *because we love one another.* Pure and simple. In the midst of everything that can and will go

wrong when human beings come together in community, Jesus comes among us and says the only thing that matters is love.

I have my reading glasses on, so I can't really see your eyes, but I can imagine some eye-rolling at this point. Right? All you need is love. That and two dollars – or, maybe four dollars - will get you a cup of coffee. Well, we can roll our eyes all we want, but that's what he said, and that's what we're called to do. So instead of the eye-rolling it might be a better idea to wonder together about what it means to love one another in the context of Christian community.

Generous heart that he is, Jesus said and did many things that last night, to show us just what he meant. He didn't let what other people thought or did move him away from what he knew to be true. He stripped and stooped to wash the feet of his friends, including Judas. That's how he showed them what it was to be a loving servant leader. He told them he would lay down his life for them, and that even though they couldn't go where he was going, that didn't mean he wasn't still with them. *Everywhere there is love*, he seemed to say, *I am there*. Everything Jesus said and everything he did that night was to teach them how to live together in community, to live in God's own way of being.

This sort of loving isn't something we can do on our own, just in our families or even with a group of treasured friends. It is so much bigger than anything we can imagine. If we let this love take us over, we will find ourselves pushed far beyond the comfortable and familiar places, to the places where we're unsettled and unsure, places where we have to rely on JESUS as our savior, rather than thinking we can save ourselves. If we let this love take us over, we will likely find that we can no longer tolerate the injustices that leave the privileged few with power and resources, and the unfortunate many without clean water, decent shelter or even supper. If we let this love take us over, we will seek a new way of listening, no longer satisfied to call people "wrong" simply because they don't think the way we do. If we let this love take us over, we will know that each and every one of us is precious to God and that the Body of Christ cannot be complete until all, especially the ones who aren't like us, have been welcomed in.

As it turns out, that one simple command is big work. It's hard work. It's work we need to do together – with each other and for each other. Because when we stretch beyond what we know and beyond what is comfortable, when we love as God loves, the world starts to look very different. It starts to look like the new heaven and the new earth St John the Divine spoke of.

*See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his people, and God himself will be with them; ...See, I am making all things new.*

It's hard to imagine that these days, isn't it? When, good Lord will all things be made new, when will we see this new heaven, this new earth? And God says something like...  
*Just love one another. Love one another and you'll start to see it everywhere.*

I see a new heaven and a new earth in the family that started monthly soup nights in their living room so neighbors could get to know each other, and get “a taste of the Kingdom of God” in the experience of community. I see a new heaven and a new earth in the woman who left a church dinner to visit with the homeless people across the street. She felt God was calling her to make picnics for those folks, and for many years, that’s just what she did. I see a new heaven and a new earth in the Syrian refugee in Germany who spends a large portion of what little money she has to make her family’s special vegetable soup for homeless Germans in her impoverished neighborhood. I see a new heaven and a new earth when this community welcomes the men from congregations for the homeless, not just in offering food and shelter, but in the relationships that grow out of listening to each other’s stories. I see a new heaven and a new earth in every grown-up who volunteers with our children, in every mentor for our youth, in the work of every hand on the altar guild, in every Thanksgiving meal cooked and delivered, in every little face at Vacation Bible Camp, in every glorious piece by Charles and the choir, in every welcoming smile, in every baptism, every confirmation, every prayer offered up, every single tender mercy. I see a new heaven and a new in every one of your faces.

You see, every time we love one another, the world is made new. The new heaven and new earth become incarnate in us, and through us, and among us. This isn’t something far off in an unknown future, it’s right here, right now, right smack in the middle of the stories of our lives. God is infusing the world with a love so powerful that nothing can deny it. It’s already here, we just need to live into it. It’s true, you know. “All the way to heaven **is** heaven.”<sup>1</sup>

On the night before he died, Jesus told us what to do. And today, as we come together in this place to do what Jesus and his friends did that last night in an upper room, his word for us is still the same. Listen. Can you hear it? Love one another. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Saint Catherine of Siena