

Sermon – John 13:31-35
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Grace Lutheran Church
5 Easter – Year C
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“What Time is It?”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name of God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Each morning, our trip to Grace follows similar patterns. Greta, Anders, and Torsten ride with me most days. The routine usually involves some cajoling; before we get in the car, I yell up the steps, reminding them to put socks on, to brush their teeth. In the car, they usually ask to sing along to the soundtrack from *Hamilton*; there is certainly something delightful about hearing a five-year-old boy confidently rap about American history. There is conversation about the day that was, and the new day now unfolding, as we discuss who has track practice, or rehearsal for the school musical, or a friend’s birthday party in class. But something else happens most mornings, often more than once. Something will catch a child’s eye, and they’ll call out, “Grace car!” When this phenomenon first developed, I would look for “race cars,” but that’s not what they were seeing. They were noticing other cars making the journey up Harlem Avenue, and how did they know these other cars were bound for Grace? (Show Grace School magnet). Because of this, the same magnet that we have on the back of our car. You can learn a lot about people from the bumper stickers and magnets on the back of their vehicle. We place identity markers there for the world to see, proudly displaying our affiliations and announcing our values. For us, and for many families, that makes us owners of Grace cars – the cars which bring children to Grace to be immersed in a loving community focused on faith, academics, and character. Grace cars – you can spot ‘em all over the place, plain as day.

2. We announce our identities to the world in many ways. But how do others discover what matters most to us? By what we do. For better or for worse, by what we do. Which is why I always try to remember that I have a Grace magnet on my car; I'd hate to do anything on the road that would bring shame upon our good name! Our gospel reading this morning takes us back in time, before Easter, to that Upper Room where Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples. He has washed their feet; he has celebrated his Last Supper. And now, after Judas goes out to betray Jesus and set the fateful events of the Passion in motion, Jesus gives them a new commandment. They are to love one another; as he has loved them, they also – you also – should love one another. Jesus goes on: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." How will people know who we are? By magnets or stickers or nametags? No, by our love for one another.

3. Jesus does not simply encourage us to love; no, we'd surely get that wrong, turn it into a Hallmark sentiment, an ethereal emotion. We are to love in a specific way – as Jesus loves us. Jesus issues this mandate upon his soon-to-be-born church in the moment that will lead to his death. But he is not despondent. Indeed, he refers to his suffering and death as a glorification. If you want to see what the glory of God looks like – God at the height of power – look no further than Jesus in his crucifixion. That is what glory looks like, for that is what love looks like – the Son of Man who is also God's creative, creating Word, giving up his life unto death that we who were bound by death could begin to live. *That* is God. And if you want people to know you follow this Jesus, this is how you live, and this is how you love. Not by dying to save sinners; that's taken care of. But by living with a love that gives itself away for the sake of others.

4. We are disciples of the glorified Lord, this Jesus who died and was raised. Who we are grows out of whose we are, and this new identity moves our

- lives in new directions. We see this unfold in the Book of Acts, as the good news of Jesus Christ moves outward from Jerusalem. As it moves, Peter and the others discover that new identity markers are in play. Whereas before, to be part of God's people was to be set apart and marked as different, now the opposite is true. To drive this home, the Spirit sends Peter a vision – a beautiful buffet on a blanket with the command to eat of these foods that the laws of his people had long forbidden. These laws were good and purposeful, keeping a remnant of humanity holy for God's purposes in a broken world. But now, in Christ, everything changes. Peter is told to eat, for now in Christ, neither his identity nor that of those to whom he preaches is marked by the keeping of law. Now what matters is the giving of love, following the Spirit as it breaks down every barrier and distinction between people, as the good news lays claim to more and more people. I also like when this passage comes up in the lectionary so that I can remind my wife, Erika, that her vegetarianism may be less than God's divine plan for her life, but I digress.
5. We see a vision of where this is leading in Revelation. There, at the end of the story, we see no barriers or walls, no distinctions among God's people. We shall simply be there, children of God in a new Jerusalem prepared for Jesus, giving loving praise to the one who first loved us, the Lamb of God whose dying and living make life possible. Death and mourning, crying and pain will be no more. This is our future, of which Eugene Peterson wrote, "The biblical story began, quite logically, with a beginning. Now it draws to an end, not quite so logically, also with a beginning. The sin-ruined creation of Genesis is restored in the sacrifice-renewed creation of Revelation."
 6. Odd as it seems at first, as disciples of Jesus we live in the world of Acts and the world of Revelation at the same time. Living between resurrection and resurrection – Jesus' and our own – we follow the Spirit's lead to break down barriers with love as we rest in the promise that the end of the story is secure. As we joyfully anticipate the end of death and mourning and weeping

and pain, so are we inspired – quite literally filled with the Spirit – to work against the powers of death and pain, to bring hope to the mourning and the weeping, here and now in our own time. That is how Jesus so often shows up. Through us. For a hurting and broken world that needs signs of hope. For this, Jesus sends you. You are – more than anything else – one who is loved. And you are called therefore to be one who loves. Through the love of God at work in us, the future of God’s story breaks into the pain of the present, and with it brings hope and an ever-new beginning.

7. You may have heard the story, perhaps apocryphal but no matter, of the tourist who asked the Amish man if he was Christian. The Amish man replied, “You’ll have to ask my neighbor.” This command of Jesus on the night of his betrayal drives us to this point, that how we live as followers of Jesus matters. No, we are not saved by our works. But in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are set free to work for the well being of our neighbors. While our lives will not be perfect, they *are* marked by the cross, moving us, inspiring us, to let our lights so shine before others that they may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. These are the words spoken to the newly baptized, and they are words for each of us. May we, as we navigate the roads of this world, shine brightly and love boldly for others to see. The world needs you, you who are the Body of Christ at work in the world. Be magnetic, drawing others into God’s broad embrace of this whole world. For in the end, your identity isn’t really about you. By grace, you belong to Jesus. By his command, you belong to one another. More simply, in Jesus are you loved. In Jesus’ name, go and love. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.