

If You Have Love for One Another
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John 13:31-35 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

31 When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32 If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33 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.' 34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

As Jesus began his farewell discourse to prepare his disciples (and us) for holy living and moving forward in faith and life as his followers, he said, as our text records, "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." And he repeated this command in John 15:12 as he emphasized how vital this is to being a disciple.

According to John, Jesus began this discourse immediately after foretelling his betrayal by Judas. Knowing everything was set in motion and that he was about to be crucified, killed and resurrected, Jesus put all of that in the context of his "glorification." In these few statements, Jesus links his death and resurrection with God being glorified. Speaking of himself in the third person, Jesus said, "If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself" And, given the context of the paragraph, all of this is linked with Jesus' new commandment.

In effect, Jesus reminded the disciples of his love. He reminded them of what his love looked like and how much Jesus loved them. It's interesting that while people ask other people if they love them, nowhere in the gospels does anyone ask Jesus if he loved them. Why not? It would be like asking the Peyton or Eli Manning if they're good quarterbacks. Or asking Martha Stewart if she can keep house. Or asking Pavarotti if he can sing. Again, and again, Jesus demonstrated his love for the outcast, the leper, the woman caught in adultery, the woman who had only two pennies to give, Zacchaeus, and the disciples who too often didn't understand who Jesus was or why he came. He loved them all and had compassion on them. A woman touched the hem of his garment and his love went out to her. Jairus came pleading for Jesus to heal his daughter and Jesus' love went out for both of them. A crowd of 5,000 was hungry and Jesus had compassion for them and fed them.

In each of these instances, and many more, Jesus showed his love to be real and life-changing. No one ever **had** to ask Jesus, “do you love me?” They just felt love. And in all of this, God was glorified.

IF YOU HAVE LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER

So, Adam and I just returned from an amazing vacation to Asia. As we traveled, I had today’s scripture about loving one another in the back of my mind. Yes, I kind of worked a little bit. How might I understand and/or utilize our travels and experiences in a way to relate to Jesus’ commandment?

We were on an intensive cruise around Japan and visited 11 different port cities. Besides seeing spectacular castles and intricate gardens; besides tasting Kobe beef and ceremonial teas; we experienced love from the Japanese people. The hospitality and focus on the other, on “not me,” by all those we encountered was truly touching. I can honestly say we felt love.

One cannot visit Japan without going to Hiroshima. I’m sure you all know about Hiroshima. I’ll bet that even some of our youth have heard about Hiroshima. If you’ve never been there, go. As you might expect, there is a museum detailing the horrific events of that day and the years after. Also, there are many memorials. What’s amazing is that all of the memorials focus on peace.

There were thousands of origami cranes and we were invited to make paper cranes to add to the displays. There was a large peace bell, not just for viewing. We were encouraged to ring the bell. There were statues, gardens of beautiful flowers and ponds of colorful fish. We were encouraged to sit and rest among the flowers and trees; to enjoy the serenity; to feel the love.

The museum details the factual details of the horrors of war, but the memorials that honor those who died and suffered guide all who visit toward love.

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We got to visit the city of Hakodate on the northern most Japanese island of Hokkaido. Adam and I decided not to do any ship-sponsored excursions that day, but rather head out on our own. As we left the ship, at the end of the gang plank was a table with several Japanese cultural guides, there to provide us with maps, answer questions and provide suggestions on what to do and see. We hoped to see the infamous Japanese Cherry Blossom trees and we were lucky that they were still in bloom so late in the season. The guide told us about Fort Goryokaku, a massive, star shaped, Western style citadel, surrounded by a moat and built in the last years of the Edo Period for the defense of Hakodate against the imperialist threat posed by the Western powers. The fort eventually became a public park with hundreds of cherry blossom trees. Go

there, the guide said! Using a map she provided, we needed to find our way to the local railcar stop which would take us to the fort.

It seemed easy enough. After about 10-15 minutes of walking though, we soon realized we were turned around and not headed toward the railcar stop at all. We stood on a street corner studying the map and looking around for landmarks or street names (*). Out of nowhere, a woman walks up to us and in broken English asked if we needed help. We showed her the map with the railcars and pointed to Fort Goryokaku. She then proceeded to help us orient ourselves and get back on track.

This event, us standing on a street corner with a map trying to find our way, happened also in Sakaiminato and Takamatsu. And in those cities the same thing happened, complete strangers walked up to us and offered help. We felt loved and cared for.

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In the port city of Kitakyushu, we decided to just walk around and explore. While walking around we stopped into a 7-Eleven, of which there is one on almost every other corner, to buy some drinks and snacks. We drank our waters and nibbled on chips while we window-shopped and looked at architecture. When we finished our items, we looked for a waste bin to throw away the packaging. We didn't see a bin, so we kept walking. No recycle bins. No trash cans. Odd? We entered some businesses in which we thought would have a public trash bin, but nothing. Surely, there will be a trash can at a public bathroom. Nope. In Japanese public toilets, there are no towels to dry your hands, so no need for a trash can. (There are no hand dryers either. You're expected to air dry your hands). We ended up holding onto our trash and disposed of it when we returned to the ship. At first I thought this was extremely inconvenient, but as I thought

When we got back to the ship, we asked one of those cultural guides waiting at the port, "Why are there no trash cans or recycling bins anywhere in Japan?" She told us that the custom in Japan is that if people generate trash while in public, they hold onto it and dispose of it when they return home. Hmm. Really? I asked why. She said that it is out of respect and appreciation for the environment and others. It ensures that all public areas remain clean and tidy for everyone's enjoyment. It means that people generate less trash; because who wants to carry around trash? It means that they care about the planet and their affect upon it. It means that they demonstrate their love for others by their actions.

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In Japan, strangers showed me hospitality and respect everywhere I went. Everyone with whom I came into contact was overwhelmingly kind. People were selflessly helpful.

I don't recall being taught that Japanese people were Christians....

Oh, that's right. Most of them aren't. And I shouldn't generalize like that anyway. Or should I?

You see, in the ways that I saw Japanese people treat others and the world around them, I knew that they were loving and compassionate. And remember that's what Jesus said, "everyone will know that you are my DISCIPLES...if you have love for one another." Jesus wasn't trying to create "Christians," but disciples - followers of the way. The way of God. **Jesus taught us how to glorify God.** Jesus reminded all with whom he came into contact of God's love through not only his words, but also his actions and that's what he teaches in John 13:35. Following the way of Jesus, loving one another as Jesus loved others, is glorifying God.

Having experienced what I felt was indiscriminate, extravagant and abundant love from so many strangers in Japan, I would readily say that those people were disciples.

IF YOU HAVE LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER ... THEY WILL KNOW YOU ARE DISCIPLES.

AMEN