



## 'Resurrection Impact: Blind Love'

Fifth Sunday of Easter  
8:15 & 11:00 am, April 24, 2016  
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[Acts 11:1-18](#); [Revelation 21:1-6](#); [John 13:31-35](#)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Being a semi-empty-nester, and with our middle child poised to graduate from college in two weeks, I've spent some time recently going through boxes of stuff saved from their primary and secondary school experiences. My intent was to save the important things—a few requisite spelling tests and times table quizzes, a term paper or story, concert programs and photos—and purge the rest. It was delightful to look through everything, and surprisingly easy to decide what to save and what to purge. To be honest, I had forgotten much about my three kids' school days, and it was especially enjoyable to read their essays. For example, each child at one point or another had the assignment "My Hero Is..." and it turns out their hero was always either their mom or their dad: "My Daddy helps me with my math homework and taught me how to ride a bike..." "My Mom makes sure I get ready for school and takes me to band practice..." These essays were heartwarming reminders that our children love Randy and me, and that we love them. And when you know you are loved, well, it colors everything, it changes everything. Of course, I placed these essays tenderly on the "save" pile.

I was having so much fun, and being so productive that I then began to root through boxes containing MY stuff. I found a letter from my dad, sent to me around the time of my ordination. I wondered why I had saved it, but when I read it, I knew why. My dad was not a Christian, and I figured he never quite understood my call to be a pastor. But his letter clearly showed that he loved me, saw gifts in me for ministry, and looked forward to whatever my future path might be. I'm glad I saved that letter because it helps me remember his love for his daughter.

And then I read the first love letter my husband Randy ever sent to me. Do you think I could purge that? **Of course not!** To know we are loved, well, it colors everything, it changes everything.

You know, that love is not one-sided. Nor is it intended to be. As tenderly as I placed these stories, essays and letters on the "save" pile, I also thought of my children, my parents, my husband, with tender love in return. I thought of how we mutually, over the years, cared for and served one another in that love.

This is exactly how God would have us be as his people in his Church—living out a mutual love that is devoted to the well-being of the other. For our Lord Jesus commands us to love one another as he has loved us. You may realize the context of Jesus' words in John's Gospel this morning. It's at the time of his last supper with his disciples on the night in

which he will be betrayed. Well, actually, Jesus has already been betrayed, and he knows it. He knows his disciple Judas has set into motion a plot to have him arrested. As well, Jesus is aware that another disciple, Peter, will later that night deny even knowing him, thus saving his own hide. And yet, Jesus shares a meal with both of them, and all his disciples. He calls them his friends, his "little children." Jesus even washes the feet of his disciples. Bookended by betrayal and denial, Jesus loves them anyway, and demonstrates by washing the feet of those who sin against him. Jesus loves them anyway, and demonstrates by dying for them.

It is after the foot washing and during the meal that Jesus issues this command: "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." Isn't that ironic? I mean, Jesus knows his closest friends will fail miserably here, will fail to love him or one another countless times going forward. Yet Jesus still demonstrates that love, and commands it from them. Maybe because he knows love colors everything, changes everything.

Actually, what fascinates me about this text is not our Lord's command to love. It's what the **result is** from the loving. Jesus said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Note what Jesus **doesn't** say here. He **doesn't** say that Bible knowledge or carefully written creedal statements will be the way others will know that we follow him. As Lutheran Pastor and missionary Elisabeth Johnson puts it, "It is not by our theological correctness, not by our moral purity, not by our impressive knowledge that everyone will know that we are his disciples." Or, as author Karen Armstrong quipped, "Jesus did not say, 'They will know you are my disciples if you believe the right things.'"

Yet for nearly 2,000 years those are the very things the Church has either touted, argued about, divided over, or been identified with. Biblical interpretation, theological doctrine, power and hierarchy, worship wars, our stance on political and social issues--those are the very things that have consumed our energy and resources, and dictated our actions. Those are the very things people outside the Church witness in us, and then wonder about.

But those things don't seem to be Jesus' primary concern here. Instead, he says that love will be the hallmark of Jesus' followers, and that will be the sign others will recognize. Pastor Johnson writes, "It is quite simply by our loving acts—acts of service and sacrifice, acts that point to the love of God for the world made known in Jesus Christ."

Of course, if we look back at our spotty history as Christ-followers over the last two millennia, and our own personal spotty histories of discipleship, we might see where we have failed miserably, failed to embrace that command to love and live it out. And it will only be because Jesus still gave this command to those very folks whom he knew would fail miserably that night, still went and died for them in full devotion, that we can even attempt to live that command out today.

So here's what I want you to do later today. Find a quiet spot and recall a time in this past week when you chose to love, when you embraced that command, even if only in a small way. Perhaps you forgave someone's slight. Deferred so another person could be first. Cared for a hurting friend. Prayed for someone else and their needs, not your own.

Or it may have been a much larger act of love with greater sacrifice made. But no matter the size of the act, I am certain there was a time this week when each of us here chose to love.

And then recall a time in this past week when you found it difficult to love. When anger got the better of you. When your own desires took center stage to the neglect of someone else's needs. When your fear of scarcity in your life kept you from being generous. I am certain there was a time this week when each of us found it difficult to love. That's our human reality—we both love and fail to love.

In fact, every week of our lives will find us, the followers of Jesus, in this predicament from which we cannot seem to escape, but, praise God, for which we are forgiven, and for which we are strengthened. That is most certainly what Peter and the other disciples experienced through Jesus.

So let John's words be like a love letter saved and treasured for a lifetime. John tells us how Jesus lived and died to show us that God is perfect love, and that God loves us. And when you know you are loved, well, that colors everything, it changes everything.

**AMEN.**

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