

The Rev. Duane A. Jesse, Senior Pastor  
Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

**Weekend of Sunday, May 15, 2022**  
**5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter/Year C**  
**First Reading: Acts 11:1-18**  
**Second Reading: Revelation 21:1-6**  
**Gospel Reading: John 13:31-35**  
**Sermon Title: “Christ-like Love”**

## **Theme**

*Easter initiates a new day. It anticipates a new heaven and a new earth. The risen Christ is making all things new. In the mystery of holy baptism God has made new people of us. Today Jesus invites us to see everyone in a new light—through the lens of love.*

## **Texts:**

### **First Reading: Acts 11:1-18**

<sup>1</sup>Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. <sup>2</sup>So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, <sup>3</sup>saying, “Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?” <sup>4</sup>Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, <sup>5</sup>“I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. <sup>6</sup>As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. <sup>7</sup>I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’ <sup>8</sup>But I replied, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ <sup>9</sup>But a second time the voice answered from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane.’ <sup>10</sup>This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. <sup>11</sup>At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. <sup>12</sup>The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. <sup>13</sup>He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; <sup>14</sup>he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.’ <sup>15</sup>And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning.

<sup>16</sup>And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ <sup>17</sup>If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?’ <sup>18</sup>When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, “Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.”

### **Second Reading: Revelation 21:1-6**

<sup>1</sup>I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup>And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

<sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

<sup>4</sup>he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.”

<sup>5</sup>And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” <sup>6</sup>Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.”

### **Gospel: John 13:31-35**

<sup>31</sup>When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. <sup>32</sup>If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. <sup>33</sup>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.’ <sup>34</sup>I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

<sup>35</sup>By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

## Sermon

Our First Reading is from Acts. Acts, as you may or may not know is a shortened name for the first non-Gospel book in the New Testament. The full name is the Acts of the Apostles. And the Acts of the Apostles is a history of the birth of the Christian church. Each Easter season the First Reading is taken from Acts rather than the Old Testament because Acts tells us how the apostles acted after being confronted with the Good News that their Lord Jesus had been raised from the dead and was the Christ, the LORD's Anointed, the Messiah of God.

Now just because these people were disciples, that is, they tried to be disciplined in the way of their Lord Jesus, doesn't mean that they were able to put aside their human natures. They were common people just like you and me and so they struggled with their human sinfulness. They were real human beings and therefore subject to their prejudices and biases. A good example of this is in the First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

Peter seems to be the one whom Jesus Christ has entrusted with the formation of the church. The Roman Catholics see Peter as the first pope. Peter and the other apostles were Jews and initially saw it as the fledgling church's mission to take the Good News of the Gospel to the Jews, God's chosen people. So he and the other apostles were sent out to tell the Jews that their long-awaited Messiah had been here and gone already but would be coming back soon.

Now you may recall hearing me say that to the Jews, there were only two kinds of people. The Jews, those whom God had chosen as his people, and Gentiles, those whom, well, those whom it appeared to them that God had not chosen. So what was the point of taking the Good News to them? the disciples might have thought.

But in Chapter 10, the chapter just before our First Reading, Peter was told by God in a mystical experience that he was not to consider anyone unclean and that he should be open to the Holy Spirit's leadership no matter where or to whom that would lead him. Right after that experience, some men showed up and asked Peter to come with them to the family of some Gentiles. Peter went with them and met the family and proclaimed the Good News to them. The Holy Spirit fell on them and they began "speaking in tongues and extolling God" so says the text.

Well, I'm sure this astounded Peter. Imagine that, Gentiles hearing the Gospel and being filled with the Holy Spirit! In Chapter 10 verse 47, Luke wrote:

“Then Peter said, “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have? So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.”

You see Peter had been used by God and moved by the Holy Spirit to do that which was here-to-fore, unthinkable. He associated with Gentiles and even brought them into the fellowship of believers. These Gentiles were now part of the Body of Christ!

Well, this got Peter into a lot of trouble with the rest of the body and his explanation to the other apostles of what happened is the First Reading for today. Listen again to the conclusion of the reading; Peter told the other apostles,

<sup>17</sup>“If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” <sup>18</sup>When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, "Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life."

Do you understand the significance of what you have heard? One group of people, who understood that they were by God's design and command superior to all others, has suddenly welcomed those whom they had previously considered ritually unclean. Gee, I wonder which party the Holy Spirit was working in more.

The Gospel Reading took place during the Last Supper. The “he” who had just gone out, referred to in the first verse is Judas. He had just left the others to betray his Lord when Jesus spoke the words of our reading.

Jesus said that he was only going to be with them a short while longer. He was going to a place that they could not yet go. But before he went, he, their teacher, wanted to give them a new commandment. As I imagine the scene, they all sat up and leaned forward a little to be sure they heard him, and then he said, “I want you to love one another, just as I have loved you.” I wonder if they were disappointed.

“I want you to love one another, just as I have loved you.” I don't suppose that had

much impact on them that day. But in less than 24 hours they probably looked back on the events of Good Friday and I suspect, if they recalled his words, their blood would have run cold. "I want you to love one another just as I have loved you." Could he mean? Do you think he could have meant the cross? Do we need to love each other enough to die for one another?

It's absurd, isn't it? On the eve of his death, Jesus wasn't as concerned about his own life as much as he was about how his disciples would treat one another once he was gone. It must have been pretty important to him.

Once Jesus was asked what the most important commandment was and he said it was to love God above all else. And though no one asked, he said the second most important commandment was to love others as you love yourself. This means that we are to love ourselves. And we are to love others, any others, in the same way.

Now, in the Gospel Reading, he gave his disciples a new commandment and it also has to do with love. This commandment has to do with one's friends and partners in ministry, the Body of Christ. We are to love one another, just as Jesus has loved us. I guess you could say that love is the preeminent mark of discipleship! We can only be disciples of Jesus if we love, love God, love ourselves, and love each other. That is what I am calling "Christ-like Love."

If we were able to pull all that off we would have accomplished something wouldn't we have? If we loved each other that much, other people would be attracted to us and would want to be a part of the Body of Christ. Maybe that is what Jesus meant when he said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." We are his disciples, aren't we?

### **Raisin' the Bar Challenge**

Our love for one another is evangelical. It spreads a message! The message is that because God first loved us, we can love each other. And not just each other but also others. Perhaps even those who aren't just like us, as Peter did. Hey, would that make us apostles as well? One's who are sent out with a message of God's love and forgiveness through Christ? There is a whole world outside these doors that are hungry to hear about God's love. Our job as disciples is to make God's love

through Jesus Christ real by being living examples of it. Our job as apostles is to take the love of God in Christ to them in genuine love. I know it's scary

Most of us would say that worship is what we do on Saturday evening and Sunday morning. But I would like you to expand your understanding of worship to include everything you do after your hour of worship. As the psalmist wrote, "I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth." And from the Gospel Reading this week we can conclude that Jesus thought the greatest act of worship and devotion was to love God and love one another. Leave here and be worshipers who demonstrate the radical love of Jesus Christ. I know it's scary. We'll need help. But thank God that God has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit to encourage us to be obedient.

### **Prayer**

Lord God, we are so easily distracted by the many blessings you give us. Forgive us for our lack of devotion and our feeble attempts at worshiping you. But don't give up on us, rather, continue to send us your Holy Spirit so that we may be inspired to embrace our Lord Jesus' new commandment that we love each other as he loves us. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen