

John 13 31-35 BLUF (Bottom Line Up Front)

It's Maundy Thursday...the original Agape Meal and Maundy means Mandate! Command! Not Optional!

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."
PERIOD!

I'm going to attempt to summarize everything that Jesus taught us and the overarching goals and mission of our church going forward. These themes and questions weave themselves in and out of our common life together! All these concepts are future sermons so Let's begin!

First when Jesus taught and preached, the folks especially in the Galilee region were simple fisherman. They had no formal education aside from Torah and most likely couldn't read or write...

The message was simple, understandable, and yet dangerous to the status quo. The message was not about the head and theology. The message was about the heart and relationship. Jesus used everyday things which people knew about to teach them...seeds, sheep etc...he never went into "science" or intellectual exercises. He didn't tell them that the world was round or anything else outside their realm of imagination. Jesus met each person wherever and however they were.

It was always about Relationship WITH God and WITH each other.

The first and greatest commandment Love God with all your desires...with all your being and with all your stuff...and then manifest this love BY loving the "other". Jesus' Command to us today!

How do you demonstrate loving God... by loving one another!

And the word for Love that Jesus used was the word agape it meant to enter into relationship with respect, empathy and compassion...trying to see things from the other persons point of view without judgement.

Jesus never used words for love like eros that meant love that was physical or worthy...

And he never said you had to like the other person or their opinions. Love then is a posture of openness.

And once you are postured in such a way...open...then go and teach this way of being to others.

This is our mission statement... some call it the great commandments ...and we are commanded by God and Jesus to do this...it's not optional! And there are no exceptions.

The Bible...what is it? It's a collection of stories and poems that reflects the history of a particular group of people in a particular place and time...recording and wrestling with their relationship with the Divine Source of All Being. And context really does matter! Never check your brain at the door! When taken as a whole it's a love story between a creator and its creations... as told by us ...the creations.

Let's connect the dots between our religious language and traditions with what is relevant regardless of time and place.

It's foundation and heart is once again Love God and Love One another.

There is a flow and a trajectory to the story. It evolves and changes over time. In a lot of ways, it looks like a parent - child relationship... showing the evolution of a human being from child to adult. Learning and growing... with the parent usually knowing better.

So there are rules laid out for the child's safety... and there's teenage rebellion and turning from and to our parent, struggling with our identity and then finally comprehending that it was really never about the rules at all... but about love...a relationship... and like ALL relationships it is based on trust (the Hebrew word we translate as faith - aman). TRUST!

The preposition “with” is used more frequently than any other preposition...used over 6000 times in the bible...It seems that God’s desire is that God wishes to be “WITH” us... in relationship.

And Jesus in The New Testament focuses us back on the plot...the Spirit of all those Laws being more important than the laws themselves.

See the laws were there to guide us as we grew... and once you get the plot then they are no longer required. Once you truly know that you are loved then you can go out into the world and BE Love to others.

Love God and one another then we don’t have to worry about you killing one another do we? Seems we can get caught up in the rules and lose the plot...imagine that. So why is this so dangerous? This all seems pretty harmless on the surface.

But see ALL human groups or organizations eventually lose the plot and hijack the narrative to support their particular point of view...a particular “way of being” where one tribe is favored over other tribes...God likes us best!

And Note every people group on this planet sees themselves as right and true...no one ever sees themselves as the bad guys in the story. And when money and power enter into the equation that’s when things we get turned around.

The folks or groups in power now create God in their image to remain on top...Jesus calls this state of being “The kingdom of Man” and it’s not how God intended for us to be together... because for some of us to be on top means that many more of God’s children have to be on the bottom.

Jesus points us towards what He calls the Kingdom of God or Heaven.

Jesus calls us to Metanoia/Teshuva ...repent (ie change your heart... turn back around...change your perspective to see the thing as whole again) We have lost our way!

Now the Status Quo/ The man/The system/ The Empire... those at the top can't abide by equality. They like the "illusion" of equality... See those currently with the most stuff in this world believe they have the most to lose.

They think that somehow, they earned or deserve what they have. ENTITLEMENT... As if you can earn where you were born or how much melanin is in your skin, or who you're attracted to...

And those in power always push back the hardest. Conversely those with the most to gain by this message of sharing... well they embrace it fully... but they also might be focused on the Kingdom of man... entitled as well... trying for themselves to get more stuff for them and their tribe so that we can replace the man with a new man who looks and thinks more like their group. Dog eat dog! Welcome to the rat race!

So that's why Jesus is more concerned about your deepest desires... your heart... the word Levav... Jesus says where your treasure is there your heart lies... that's your deepest desires! So always follow the money. Where someone spends their time and money will always reveal what a person truly desires.

So is it Kingdom of man or Kingdom of God?! Is it God's will be done or my will be done for me and my own tribe?

If we look at God as a loving parent then we can imagine that children can go in all sorts of directions as they grow up... but a parent will always love their children no matter what and will wish and strive for their family to be together and whole again.

And so we ultimately all belong to a bigger tribe don't we... The Family of God... connected to all of creation as children of God... so what does that actually mean? To follow "this way" of seeing things... to be in this posture of being in the world.

In Disney's The Mandalorian (bet you didn't see that coming) their tribe expresses their code of conduct, their mandate, as this is "The way"

Interestingly enough that's exactly what the first Christians were called ...followers of "The Way"! And this posture...this WAY of being in the world IS the way...The WAY of God!

...and it will usually always conflict with the ways of man.

See it's not all about me... but rather about us – together... for the health and wellbeing of all of creation. So Jesus pulls the camera way back so that we can begin to see ourselves as part of a greater whole.

Psst: From way up here there are no border lines drawn on our planet...it's one planet!

This is the way of Jesus...the way of Love...and heaven is a state of being to be experienced right here and now...BTW same as hell...it's a state of being!

So we always live in this tension between the kingdom of man and the kingdom of God. We get hungry, tired, sick...we pay bills and follow rules... and yet all of us inherently know that there is something bigger than us. That which is unseen but that which is felt and just as real...if not more so! Like...Oxygen or Love...better get some of those things uh?

It's the thing behind the thing that connects us all as one...we call it Spirit...scientist might call it energy!

Now we can get this into our heads...but it's only when we get this deep inside... at the center of our being... that we begin to act in ways which are in alignment with God's will for all of creation.

Tekun Olam...The reconciliation and co-creation in partnership with God!

Now our perspective is always limited by our individual knowledge and experience... and so we now come together as “one diverse body” to help each other stay focused on “the way”! God’s way!

The hope is to integrate this way of being so that it becomes part of who we are...to return to our correct state of being. That’s called Shalom! To be in right relationship with God and one another.

And it must be practiced everyday to make it natural...do you know the word Zen...it means not think...think of anything that comes to you automatically...

Like driving a car...new drivers can easily become overwhelmed with all there is to think about...that’s why new drivers are prone to accidents...too much thinking!

Sometimes when I drive it’s almost unconscious...but my body, in this state, can actually react faster than my mind can process information...that’s being in a Zen state!

When we are in that state of connectedness and are open we call that discipleship...it means to be a humble, and open like a student. And once we are living this way...then we are sent to teach others this posture... especially by our example...and the word sent is the word apostle.

We do both...we learn and then we teach...taking in new wisdom and information or perspectives continually broadens our view of God and creation (it’s expansive). God can’t be contained within our smaller boxes and views of the Divine!

We are always breathing in...and then out! This act of nephesh translates as soul! We take in the Spirit and then give it back to the world...We call this Grace! Sounds easy enough...but like yoga or any other discipline it takes years of practice, and it never really ends!

So while Jesus was preaching and teaching and healing he had thousands of followers...and why not...he was giving a message where the wealthy had to share their stuff with them...where they were noticed...where they got free health care and free lunches!

But when Jesus called on them to “walk the talk” and follow Him...well only 12 or so did! And even those that followed him most closely still didn't actually get his meaning until Jesus himself walked the talk all the way to a cross.

Free food and free healthcare...count me in...community of love and giving... standing up for those with no voice...listening to those I disagree with...picking up a cross...sorry I just remembered I have other stuff to do.

See we always weigh the cost don't we... and here in the Kingdom of Man these things will cost us every time...but in God's bigger picture, this is the only way to live...the way to life...and life everlasting...this is the way!

Now how about some Politics (The Greek polis meaning city...the way in which we live and order our common life together).

For me I hang in the radical middle... either end of the political bell curve is way off target and dangerous. (6% to the far right and 8% to the far left speaking for the whole!?) And this fosters binary thinking and tends to pull us apart (diabolic – to break apart).

Paul says there is no male or female, Greek or Jew, slave or free. Paul has pulled back the camera and broadened his perspective where all become one. Dualistic thinking quickly gets us into trouble...that's why our idea of God is expressed as a Holy Trinity.

Holy (the word Kadosh) means to set apart...and Trinity takes us into third way thinking... transcending our dualistic nature where things are right/wrong and black/white... We have to get God out of our carefully

constructed boxes...the smaller we imagine God the worst it is for everyone that doesn't think the way we do. We have to expand our view of God and Imagine God greater...This is the way!

So here we are and here God is...on a journey *with* one another!

You don't need all the answers, nor do I have them...It's about the conversation together...especially the questions...it's called "turning the gem!"

I promise you God can handle all of your frustration, your anger and your questions...just like any loving parent could!

Children of God...we all need to be reminded that on this journey... We are all students and teachers...disciples and apostles...breathing in and breathing out...giving and receiving... grace upon grace...Attaining heaven...the kingdom of God is a reality that happens right where you are...it is a way of being...a way of life...not just a nice philosophy!

Jesus said it this way "you can hear and still not hear...see and still be blind...because both kingdoms coexist together.

It's like those pictures that if you look one way you see the old woman and another way you see the young woman. The secret is to know that you can go between the two and that both exist together.

Third way thinking it's not about one way OR another way...it's about AND...pulling the camera back to see them connected. What can't we see yet still experience?

Pierre Tel Chardin said we are not Human Beings having a Spiritual Experience but rather we are Spiritual beings having a Human Experience!

Therefore you are not your circumstances or your situations or your experiences or your stuff or the labels that people gave to you...you are something more...a child of the Universe...a Child of God... now go and act like it!

And the litmus test on knowing if you are on the right path is to ask yourself does this connect or divide us...build up or tear down...is this about love and other or about fear and ego?

We live in a Universe...One verse...One song...It's all connected and Holy as One! Whenever you doubt yourself always fall back on Jesus' mission statement to us: Love God and Love one another...for this is God's heart...this is God's desire for us as God's children...This is the way!

This is God's One... Holy... Family!

Your faithful servant,

carmen