

If you didn't know better, you might think that it was a warm and fuzzy moment. If you didn't know better, you might imagine a scene glowing with golden sunlight, the disciples and Jesus gathered on a soft green hill, the earth warm with the last of the day's heat, the air filled with the gentle drone of slow-buzzing insects. You might think that these words were spoken at a moment of peace and fulfillment, when the disciples had spent a long day shepherding earnest followers into the presence of their Lord, when Jesus had healed and taught with beauty and power, when God's presence had been wondrously palpable. You might imagine the disciples smiling at each other with true joy as Jesus spreads his hands wide so as to encircle them all, saying to them in a voice rich and infinitely kind, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." And the disciples would think, Of course - what else could we possibly do when we have been so well-loved by you? And they would look around at each

other, so grateful to be together, so grateful to be following this Jesus of Nazareth, so filled with love they could feel it spilling out over their little company into the whole wide world.

You might think that this would be the kind of moment when Jesus would share his new commandment, a moment when love was shining in the disciples' eyes, when they felt inspired, ready, strong enough to love this way every day for the rest of their lives. You might easily think that, if you didn't know better. But we do know better. Because we know the moment, the real moment, when Jesus proclaimed this new commandment. And just in case you don't know, the theologians who crafted our weekly lectionary very intentionally shaped today's Gospel reading to remind you. The Gospel today from John is from chapter 13, verse 3, the text of which actually begins, "When he had gone out, Jesus said...." But the Episcopal Church has seen fit to set the scene a little more deliberately, to give us the full context that this moment requires, to

tell us who the he is who has gone out and what the where is he has gone out from. And so instead of hearing, “After he went out,” we just heard, “At the last supper, when Judas had gone out, Jesus said....” This is when Jesus chooses to proclaim his new commandment – not a warm and fuzzy moment when the disciples feel particularly confident and competent and all seems right with the world. No, Jesus offers his disciples this new commandment just when their world is falling apart.

Jesus gives them his new commandment at the Last Supper, at the last possible moment, when everything they thought they knew about themselves and about their Messiah suddenly seems scarily uncertain. They are back in Jerusalem, the place Jesus has again and again predicted as the place of his arrest and crucifixion. They are gathered together, not for a moment of light and of inspiration but for a moment that is heavy with goodbyes. Jesus is leaving them – you will look for me, he tells them, but you cannot come where I am

going. What else can he mean but his own death, but what does that really mean? They sit together, anxious and afraid and absolutely confounded by what is happening. One of you will betray me, he tells them, and some of them look away, and some of them start to sweat, and some of them find tears springing to their eyes, and one of them leaves. What is going on? All the while they sit in an upper room in a city that is ruled by people who hate them. They live in a world where everything they knew about themselves as a people has been called into question, where the god of violence, not the God of hosts, seems to rule the promised land. The arc of their people’s universe has been long, but it doesn’t seem to be bending towards justice but towards only more and more suffering. And now the one person they thought could save them, the one man who could bring them back from the brink of destruction, is saying goodbye and talking about betrayal and telling them that they will look for him but will not be able to find him. It is, for these disciples, the end of the world.

And it is here, at the end of the world, that Jesus gives them this final, fundamental instruction – love one another as I have loved you. This timing was not a mistake. It was not because Jesus had forgotten to tell them before. It was not because Jesus was using the last second at the Last Supper to check things off his list that he hadn't gotten around to yet. Jesus tells his disciples to love one another as he has loved them in this dark, desperate moment because he knows that this new commandment was made for a time just like this. This commandment was made for a moment when everything seems to be lost; it is a commandment made for the end of the world. And at the end of the world, he tells them, this is what my disciples do: love one another the way that I have loved you – ferociously and faithfully, tenderly and tenaciously, in times of peace and in times of struggle, when their hearts are pure and when they are filled with thoughts of betrayal, when they deserve it and when they don't, when they are centered and when they are sinful, when they are dirty and

when they are clean. At the end of the world, this is what my disciples do – love and love and love.

The love of Christ is made for a time like this, my friends. As we huddle here on a morning when in so many ways it seems like the world we know is ending, hear what this Gospel is speaking to you – that the love of Christ is made for a moment like this. The love of Christ is made for times that are heavy with hatred and abuse. The love of Christ is made for times when we are anxious and afraid and absolutely confounded by what is happening. The love of Christ is made for times when we feel betrayed – by our government, by our neighbors, by the Church that is complicit in so much of the fear-based persecution and morally-superior power grabs that are happening right now. The love of Christ is made for times when so many of us feel like we are governed by powers that hate us because of who we are, who we love, where we come from, what language we speak, or what we believe. The love of Christ is made for times when

we feel weighed down with grief for the world we once knew, or the world we were hoping to someday know. The love of Christ is made for times when it seems like the moral arc of the universe is bending towards reaction and retaliation instead of mercy, justice, and truth. The love of Christ is made for times just like this.

This is what we do at the end of the world: we love as Christ first loved us. Because you and I know better, because we know that the love of Christ is not about just warm and fuzzy. The love of Christ is not a nice idea that helps the world to be a slightly better place. The love of Christ is not about bearing the end of the world with a smile on our face; the love of Christ is about changing the end of the world. The love of Christ has already changed the end of the world from one of death and dissolution to one of rebirth and new life. The love of Christ has the power to change us, to change our context, to redeem this moment, to change our story from one of desperation and despair to one of compassion and justice.

Beloved, Christ is calling you to love this day. Not because this is a warm and fuzzy moment. Not because it's easy or because you're inspired and you can't imagine doing anything else. And not because it is a last-ditch effort to do something good in this impossible and heartbreaking world. Love one another as Christ has loved you because the love of Christ is made for a moment like this. Love one another as Christ has loved you, ferociously and tenaciously, by serving one another, particularly those our society seems to be rejecting - immigrants and refugees, people of color, those living in poverty, the LGBTQ+ community and their children, women of all ages and in all places. Love one another as Christ has loved you - and oh, how Christ has loved you - because that love has the power, the very real power, to heal and change the world. Love one another as Christ has loved you. This is just what we do at the end of the world. It is enough, because it is everything.

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