

**Sermon for Easter V Year C 2019**  
*Judas Has Left the Building, Jesus Remains, Will We?*

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth . . .*  
*And the One seated on the throne said,*  
*“See, I am making all things new . . .”*  
What a magnificent vision and powerful promise  
the book of Revelation concludes with!

But in the last few weeks, I’ve seen and heard something very different.  
Shootings in synagogues and schools,  
escalating tensions continue between our country and Iran  
and North Korea,  
anxiety and worry over the global economy  
and global warming . . .  
Bombings and protests not only at the state, national, and global levels.  
They are local too.  
For some of us the ground beneath our feet seems to be shaking;  
the structures of our life are collapsing.  
It’s as if the whole world is imploding.  
It seems, sometimes, that mercy, grace, and love are not valued  
and becoming a lot harder to find.

With all that I have seen and heard,  
I go back to the revelation to John of Patmos,  
but I’m not sure I want to read or hear his words again.  
Because I want to see what he saw.  
I want to hear what he heard.  
And I think I’m not alone in that.  
People near and far want to see and hear.  
Many of you want to see and hear.  
The darkness of the circumstances, however,  
makes it difficult to see and hear  
that all things are being made new.

How fitting it is then that today's gospel  
takes us back to another dark night . . .  
a last supper, a betrayal,  
a departure, an impending death.  
It is the night before Jesus' crucifixion.  
He has fed his disciples.  
He has washed their feet.  
Judas has gone, he has left the building—  
He has stepped out into the night of betrayal.  
But Jesus remains with his disciples  
and he tells them that he is leaving  
and that they cannot go with him.  
Peter and Thomas will ask what everyone is thinking:  
“Why not?  
Where are you going?  
How will we find our way if you are not there?”  
They, no doubt, feel the structures of their lives crumbling  
and the ground shaking beneath them.  
They sense that their world is changing.

The disciples will have to learn, see, and trust  
that even in the midst of terror and tragedy,  
chaos and pain,  
death and sorrow . . . indeed all things are being made new.  
And, so must we.  
We, too, must learn that God's “making new”  
happens in the midst of—not apart from—  
the circumstances of our lives and world.  
Just as it was the work of the disciples then,  
so it is our work now.  
But—here's the kicker—it is not easy work.  
It is some of the most difficult work we ever do.  
Because it is the work of love.

*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.*

This commandment is Jesus' departing instructions.

The clock is ticking fast  
and Jesus knows that his disciples  
are about to face the greatest devastation of their lives.

So, he gets right to the point.

No parables,  
no stories,  
no pithy sayings.

This is Jesus' last opportunity to say what he wants to say.

So, he issues one commandment.

One simple, straightforward commandment,  
summarizing his deepest desire for his followers—

*Just as I have loved you . . .*

*You also should love one another.*

Stop and think for a moment what Jesus doesn't say.

When death comes knocking, and he has mere hours left to  
communicate the heart of what he wants his disciples to know,  
he doesn't say—*Believe the right things.*

He doesn't say—*Maintain personal and doctrinal purity.*

He doesn't say—*Worship like this or attend a church like that.*

He doesn't say—*Read your bible or pray every day.*

He says—*Love one another.*

Now this is less something to be accomplished and  
more a way of living and being,  
an orientation and disposition.

It will insure Jesus' presence among the disciples  
and continue his work of making all things new.

*As I have loved you,  
so you should love one another.*

The space Jesus once physically occupied amongst his disciples is now to be filled with sharing his love with one another.

Loving one another as Christ first loved us makes him present in whatever circumstances we might find ourselves. His command to love as he has loved is both our preparation for and our participation in his resurrected life here and now.

Christ-like love reveals the new heaven and new earth. Christ-like love is the gateway, the entry, into the new Jerusalem. It is Christ's love—not ours—that makes all things new. His love is both the means and the goal, a journey that has no ending and a destination that has no fixed point.

The love Jesus commands is independent of who the other is or what our feelings about him or her are. It is not determined by our assessment of his or her qualities or lovability. It takes us beyond sentimentality, beyond emotions, and beyond familial kinship. It bears repeating . . . it is not about a feeling, love is a choice. So if we are Christ's disciples, we show it by our choices—by choosing to love one another. The mark of his disciples is not what they believe, but how they love.

Since love is more about choice, than a feeling,  
love is a commitment, an attachment,  
a loyalty to the other that is embodied  
and enacted in concrete ways.  
We do not believe or reason our way into loving one another.  
We act our way into loving another.  
That's what Jesus did.  
His life, death, and resurrection are nothing less  
than the embodiment and enactment of love.  
You and I, his disciples, continue that through  
loving one another.

But, perhaps, you think Jesus is asking for the impossible.  
Maybe he is.  
One Christian theologian, G. K. Chesterton once wrote,  
*The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting.  
It has been found difficult and left untried.*

Imagine what would happen to us,  
to the Church, to the world,  
if we took his final words,  
his commandment to love seriously.  
What then?  
What if we took his words to heart  
and let him cultivate that “impossible” love within us and among us?  
What then?

Now I ask these questions a fearfully  
because I don't know how to answer them, even for myself.  
I mean, I know fairly well how to do things.  
I know how to make care packages for the homeless.  
Or bring a dish to share at a church potluck.  
Give donations to church and other charities.  
But do I really know how to love as Jesus loved?  
To choose compassion over retribution.

To experience a hunger for justice so fierce and so urgent that I  
rearrange my life in order to pursue it?  
To learn to empathize with others  
so different from me that my heart breaks.  
To seek the good for everyone, even those who do not seek my good?  
Do I really want to do all that?

What about you?  
Do you really want to do all that?  
Would it be better to be safe?  
To keep our circle small and manageable?  
To choose the people we love based on our own affinities and  
preferences—and not on Jesus' all-inclusive commandment?

Charitable actions can come easy.  
But cultivating our hearts?  
Preparing and pruning it to choose love?  
Becoming vulnerable in authentic ways to the world's pain?  
Those things are not easy.  
They are difficult and costly.

And, yet, this was Jesus' dying wish.  
Which means that we have a God who first and foremost wants every  
one of his children to be loved, and to know they are loved.  
Not shamed.  
Not punished.  
Not chastised.  
Not judged.  
Not isolated.  
But loved.

It's not easy but it may be fairly simple when we get right down to it.  
It's about people, life, and circumstances.  
It is about seeing that "the home of God is among mortals."

It looks like people running towards  
the disasters and tragedies to help the injured.  
It's a bedside vigil when all you can do is hold a hand.  
It's standing next to another and listening to his or her diagnosis.  
It's advocating for the common good  
through all your spheres of influence.  
It's the courage to stand with and for  
the despised, the lost, the lonely, the seemingly unlovable.  
It's giving one's money to care for another  
whom we have never or will never meet or know,  
to assure that someone else will have what they need.  
It's choosing to forgive, to err on the side of grace  
and help someone not by giving them just a hand out,  
but a hand up.

These and a million other acts and choices like them  
are the acts of love that have been done for us  
that by God's grace, we can do for one another.  
When we see these things happening,  
we see a new heaven and a new earth coming into being.  
When we hear stories about these choices, these acts of love,  
we experience all things being made new.

That means that the vision in the Revelation of John is  
a reality as close as the person next to you  
and as broad as the stranger on the other side of the world.  
*As I have loved you,*  
*you also should love one another,* Christ says.  
Will we walk away from this new heaven and earth?  
Will we walk out and leave the kingdom of God?  
Or will we remain with Jesus and help him as he makes all things new?  
The choice is ours.