

As I read this passage today several weeks after Holy Week has occurred I wonder why we are reading it now. The reading is set in the upper room immediately after the last supper. But it's maybe a good thing to reflect again on something that has become a very familiar reading to us if we have spent time in church all our lives. Maybe this passage that comes at the end of the supper is not so well remembered, however we find in it three themes, namely Christ's glorification, the preparation for his departure, and a new commandment to love each other. Each of these themes is laced with a paradox. What is a paradox? A Paradox is a situation or statement that seems impossible or is difficult to understand because it contains two opposite facts or characteristics. So here's an example of a paradox, Oscar Wilde said "I can resist anything but temptation".

So let's look at our passage today to understand these paradoxes.

The first paradox is this : **Christ's glory is only revealed because of betrayal.** Remember that Jesus says these things to his disciples just after Judas has left to betray him, and just before he tells Peter, "before the rooster crows you will deny me three times" (v 38). Betrayal is woven throughout this chapter. And bound together with that betrayal is his glory.

In order for God to be glorified in Jesus, Jesus must go to his death. When Judas betrays and Peter denies Jesus, they set the stage for God to glorify Christ in the future. Jesus has to be lifted up in resurrection, redeeming us all from sin and death, in order that God is glorified.

So what does this word 'glory' really mean, anyway? This is all about the display or character or nature of God found in the relationship between God and Jesus. Your glory is your character and nature shining in what you do and how you interact with others. For us every day our Glory is seen in our true selves, and that may not be a very nice thing. And yet in Christ our Glory is transformed. Romans 6:17 & 18 says "we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:16-18). It's a paradox.

For God's glory to be revealed to us and in us, we must experience God's grace. We will never be glorified with Christ if it wasn't for what he has already done for us on the cross. We have betrayed and denied Jesus, and yet it is through him that we can share in that glory.

That brings us to another paradox: **the One who says, "Follow me" also says, "You can't come where I'm going."**

You remember that Jesus told his disciples to Follow him. He also said that we are deny all that we cling on to, take up our cross and follow him. But now in verse 33 he says to his followers "Where I am going, you cannot come".

And yet like Peter we can stand firm and declare our intention to follow Jesus at all costs, but when it comes down to it, when our identity is challenged, when we think following Jesus makes us look weird or won't help us fit in with the people we want to impress, whenever following Jesus just isn't convenient, we downplay our commitment and devotion.

Peter knows exactly how we feel. And just as Jesus knew exactly how Peter would react under pressure, Jesus knows our hearts – he calls us to follow him irrespective of the state of our hearts, but he knows there is a work to be done in us here. Jesus says to Peter in verse 36, “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.”

Yes we want the glory right away, but our commitment is to follow him here and await the glory that will be ours. For many of us I think we don't realise that God has work for us to do here before we receive our reward in heaven. There's more, and you can't go there yet, but you will. In the meantime, here's what it really means to follow me: “Love each other.”

This is the third paradox in today's passage. The Old Testament commandment is made completely new. Because he is going away, the disciples need a new way to be identified by the world. That way is love.

This is the ‘new commandment’ Jesus gives, but it sounds a lot like the ‘greatest commandment’. What is “new” is the way this command teaches us to love our neighbours, not as we love ourselves, but as Christ loves us.

And so this raises the bar, doesn't it? Because we don't always love ourselves very well. But if I am going to love someone as Christ has loved me, I have to be willing to lay down my life, not just a few hours of my time, I've go to lay down my life for that person in the way that Jesus has done for me. This is the kind of sacrificial love Christ commands us to have for each other. Loving each other as Jesus has loved us identifies us as belonging to Christ.

The command to love is not a command to feel something. It's a command to *do* something. It's a command to serve each other, take care of one another. How we do that shows the rest of society what it means to follow Jesus, and what it means to be loved by God.

John opened this chapter 13 with the statement that, “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (John 13:1). He loved his disciples fully, to the end, every one of them. And now John closes the chapter with the new commandment from Jesus to love one another, just as Jesus has loved: fully, to the end, every one of us.

Just as Jesus could wash Judas' feet, and feed him the bread and cup he shared with all the disciples at his last meal, he expects us to offer grace and hospitality to everyone, even the ones who insult us, even the ones who throw accusations at us. Even the ones who don't like us. Jesus “loved them to the end” so that we might love one another in just the same way.

This kind of love leads to just one thing: our transformation. How are we changed when we know we are loved? How are we changed when we love someone else? How does the way we love bring glory to God, and keep us following Jesus even when he's gone from our sight? In the middle of all these paradoxes in our passage is that theme of bringing glory to God through how we love.

I think in many respects, even though we are 2000 years on, we are still so like those disciples. We still have work to do here, and yet we want to receive the glory now –

we want to go where Jesus is going and yet he says not yet. And I think from this passage, we are left with a few questions to wrestle with this morning, ones that I'm not going to tackle, but rather leave for each of us to consider in our own time :

1. As we reflect on the glory of God revealed through what Jesus did for us, how today are we bringing him glory in our lives?
2. As we reflect on following Jesus, how much are we really committed to following him to the end no matter what the cost is to us?
3. As we reflect on the love that God has shown to us in Christ, do we truly love our neighbours as we love ourselves? How is that love expressed? Does our love for others reflect the depth of love shown to us by Christ?

On your way out today, those three questions have been left out for you if you wish to consider this week in your own walk with God.