

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Easter 5 – Confirmation Sunday  
May 18, 2025  
Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl  
**Love is the greatest glory**

<sup>31</sup> After Judas left, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in him. <sup>32</sup> If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify the Son in himself and will glorify him at once.”

<sup>33</sup> “Dear children, I am going to be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

<sup>34</sup> “A new commandment I give you: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, so also you are to love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

—John 13:31-35 EHV

The central thought for today’s service is “**Because Jesus lives, we live lives of lavish love.**” The apostle John wrote the words before us today from John 13, but he didn’t just write these words, he also wrote, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these words in 1 John 3: **How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are.**

My brothers and sisters in Christ,

On page 9 of your service folder are the words for our text today. John starts this paragraph with the words: “After Judas left...” Where did he go? Oh, the disciples figured that Judas went out to buy some groceries or to give some food to the poor, but Jesus knew where he was going. And so do you. He had an appointment with some Jewish religious leaders and a group of soldiers. This was his big night. Just give Jesus a kiss good-bye and go home with 30 silver coins in his pocket.

Just imagine the pain that must have been for Jesus. Betrayed by your brother. Forsaken by your friend. Jesus knows very clearly what is about to take place. Judas sold him out. Judas betrayed his Lord. And in the midst of those events, Jesus repeats two words that just seem odd in this context: glorify and love. Five times Jesus uses the word “glorify” and four times he uses the word “love.” In these five short verses, he piles on the word “glorify” and “love.”

Well, I suppose we should make sure we understand what he means by that. What do you picture with glory? The NFL Super Bowl championship team stands on the platform hoisting the Vince Lombardi trophy? They are glorified. The kid who keeps reminding his friends that he scored the winning basket in the championship basketball game? He’s trying to glorify himself. We get it. To be glorified is to be at the top. All the people are singing your praises and giving rounds of applause.

So, doesn’t it just seem a little odd that Jesus talks about glory *here*? Judas has left the room. He’s betraying his friend, his teacher, his Lord. He sold Jesus out for a few bucks. And in that context, Jesus describes himself and his Father at the top. Five times. “Now the Son of Man is **glorified**, and God is **glorified** in him. If God is **glorified** in him, God will also **glorify** the Son in himself and will **glorify** him at once.”

And I just wonder if the disciples weren’t thinking to themselves, “Ah, Jesus, didn’t you teach us to be humble? Didn’t you teach us that the first will be last and the last will be first. Didn’t you just model for us humble service as you washed our feet?”

And if that’s what the disciples were thinking, Jesus has an answer. “My children, you’re paying attention. You’re starting to get it. You are seeing what glory really is.”

The road to the top isn’t paved with bodies that you have climbed over. The path to glory isn’t about climbing a ladder and getting higher than everyone else. The road isn’t marked with signs that boast “me, me, me.” The road to glory is ... well, what is it? Jesus doesn’t really say. He kind of leaves his disciples in suspense. He says, “Dear children, I am going to be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.”

Where is Jesus going? Oh, you know. He has an appointment with some Jewish religious leaders and a group of soldiers, and Judas will be there, and so will so many other people. God will be there, too, and he will turn his back on his Son because God can’t have sin in his presence. And it’s in connection with *that*, that Jesus says, “Now the Son of Man is **glorified**, and God is **glorified** in him.”

The platform for Jesus' glory is the cross. For Jesus, this is the top. This isn't just a way to get to the top as though the cross is just a rung to climb through to something more. No. For Jesus, this is the top. This is his greatest glory. It's almost as if with his hands outstretched, pinned to that cross, Jesus says, "**I've reached my goal!**"

And there's only room for one up there. His disciples can't come along. The disciples can't even understand that right now. But they will. They will. Later his disciples will understand as they have Jesus' words ringing in their ears, and they remember the other word repeated over and over again.

"A new commandment I give you: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, so also you are to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

You know, Jesus isn't changing the subject here. He's teaching his disciples about what is so glorious about his crucifixion. It's the greatest act of *love*.

So, I suppose we should also talk about this word, too, huh? What do you picture with the word "love"? A lot of people might jump to the romantic love between a man and a woman. Or maybe they will think of the love between two good friends. But what is love for Jesus?

Love isn't that fickle, feel-good feeling that you have toward someone you long to spend time with. No, for Jesus, love is selflessness. For Jesus, love is this relentless resolve to give others what they need no matter how much it costs you and no matter how much they don't deserve it. For Jesus, love is all about putting others' needs above his needs. For Jesus, love shows itself in action: "You are more important to me than I am to myself."

This is weird, but for Jesus, **love is the greatest glory**. He knows what Judas is up to. He looks around the table, and he knows that Peter and the other disciples are only hours away from deserting him. He knows that in less than a day he will be tortured to death. He knows that he's just hours away from experiencing the agonizing loneliness of hell. And with love in his heart and action on his mind, he says, "Now the Son of Man is **glorified** and God is **glorified** in him." Can't you just picture Jesus saying it to the disciples? "Boys, brace yourselves. You are about to see me at my best."

My brothers and sisters, change the scene. Instead of sitting with Jesus' around the Passover table, put yourself at your own dinner table. Or put yourself at a table in the Ministry and Education Center eating (confirmation cake). What do you see when you look across the table?

Do you see your spouse? Long ago your spouse just swept you off your feet. Oh, you were so in love. But maybe that seems so long ago. And right now, you look across the table and there's this wall of wrongs stacked between you. And lately it just seems as though the tiny little annoyances set you off. And there are days, maybe more than you care to admit, where you wonder, "Where is the love in our relationship?"

Or you look across the table and you see your parents. And even though you know that you owe them honor and respect, right now you are so annoyed by them. You don't talk to them. You shut your door on them. You want nothing to do with them.

Or you get up from the dinner table and you turn on the TV or you scroll through TikTok and what do you see? Almost everything you look is warfare all the time. Everyone stepping on everyone else, bolstering themselves higher than others; people using social media to tear someone else down.

Where's the love? I mean true, sacrificial, selfless love. Not that self-centered disgusting stuff you so often see plastered on the internet. Where's the love that says, "I'm going to go into action for your best interest no matter how much it costs me?"

It's hard to find. It's hard to find love these days. Not true love. It's hard to find the kind of love that Jesus talks about, that selfless, other-focused love, that seeks, not just in words but in actions, what is best for the other person.

But, my friends, love has not vanished. Jesus' words still ring in our ears. "Love one another. Just as I have loved you, so also you are to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." There was only room for one on *Jesus'* cross, but Jesus' disciples would follow later in a very real sense. That's true because Jesus' crucifixion and his resurrection and the Holy Spirit changed them. Later on, the disciples would get it. Later on, they would learn to love. And when they did, people would look at them and they would see a little slice of Jesus. People would look at his disciples and see this relentless resolve to give people what they need.

It's fascinating how Jesus finishes that sentence, isn't it?

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you ... speak in the tongues of men and of angels, right? No.

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you ... have the gift of prophecy and know all the mysteries and have all knowledge, (and you know all the answers to the examination questions), and you have all faith so as to move mountains, right? No.

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you ... give away everything you own, and if you give up your body to the fire, right? No.

A thousand times, No. It's way harder than that! “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” It's not that complicated, right? Love one another. It's not complicated. Oh, but it can feel like the most impossible thing in the world when that wall of wrongs has grown, and your parents annoy you, and the world is filled with hate and hostility, right?

So, let's zero in on just five words from Jesus. “As I have loved you.” With those words, Jesus isn't just giving you an *example*. No, he's giving you a promise. With those words, Jesus is telling you ... that he loves you.

And if you think those words are insignificant, then I suggest you think about those words a little more deeply. Even when Jesus knew everything that you would do to *not* deserve his love, he still went to his cross alone and took away everything you have done to *not* deserve his love.

And, brothers and sisters, Jesus calls *that* his greatest glory. Jesus says that's his greatest glory. The greatest thing Jesus ever did was **to love you all the way to hell so that he could pick you up and put you in the arms of God.**

“As I have loved you...” So, think about your relationship with your spouse or your parents or your friends or your neighbors or someone else in your life right now. Do you think that Jesus loves you any less right now than when he died for you? Or do you think that Jesus is still dead and those words are just a passing eulogy? As if the words “As I have loved you...” are the cover for his funeral service? No way! He's alive. And he's still filled with the same relentless resolve to give you what you need no matter the cost.

So, even when you are two feet away from your spouse and there's the impenetrable wall of wrongs between you, Jesus is still loving you. So, even when you have closed the door on your parents and you want nothing to do with them, Jesus is sitting next to you in your room loving you. So, even when the world displays warfare and hate, Jesus has your back, and he still loves you.

So, how about you stick out your neck and set aside your pride, and you rip up those records of wrongs and love them. If they step on you, oh, it hurts. But what of it? You are in the arms of the King. You're on the top platform with your Lord. Jesus has you, and he will never let you go. **Because he lives, we live lives of lavish love.** Amen.