



## The Message: The Trouble with Love

After washing the disciples' feet, and dipping bread into wine and giving it only to the one who would betray him, Jesus says to the disciples,

"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."

You may have missed this momentous news amidst all the craziness out there: Last Thursday was the last episode of The Big Bang Theory. Don't tell me about it: I have a few years to catch up on.

There is a scene in that series that is repeated almost weekly. Sheldon, who has some obsessive compulsive behaviours, goes across the hall and knocks on his neighbour Penny's door. He can't just knock once. It's always three times, and he says, "Penny" after each knock. Penny finds ways to make this less than tedious. Once, after the first knock, she calls out, "Who do you love?" Sheldon, never one comfortable expressing affection, is forced to say, "Penny!" This is repeated three times.

It's practically the same dialogue that Jesus has with Peter. "Who do you love?" "You Lord." "Then feed my sheep." x3

In Sheldon and Penny's exchange there is a mix of coercion and compulsion. In the exchange between Peter and Jesus, there is consequence. And there is a repetitive pattern in both situations. Either way, there is no doubt that love is complicated.

Our gospel reading today begins with Jesus giving us a vision of glory - 5 times!

### Slide 1

John 13.31

- Now the Son of Humanity has been glorified,
- God has been glorified in him.
- If God has been glorified in him,
- God will also glorify him in himself
- God will glorify the Son of Humanity at once.

### Slide 2

What is glory?:

dignity, majesty, celebrity, triumph, immortality, splendour, prestige, honour, grandeur, brilliance, lustre, kudos, exaltation, renown, praise, magnificence, distinction, eminence, adoring praise, worshipful thanksgiving.

In the passage from Revelation glory is described as

- a new heaven and a new earth;
- the holy city, the new Jerusalem,
- God present among us, with us;

- Wiping away our tears.
- Conquering death and grief, weeping and pain.

All things are new.

To really understand glory, we need to go back to the Gospel of John and look at what Jesus says right after.

As soon as Jesus lifts up glory, he gives the disciple this commandment:

Slide 3

Jesus' Commandment:

1. "that you love one another."
2. "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."
3. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Again a pattern of three -- Penny and Sheldon's pattern of three harks back to Jesus asking Peter three times, "Who do you love?"

Jesus repeats the commandment three times in slightly different language, perhaps making sure we understand how important this is.

If what came after Jesus vision of glory is really important, what came before is a cautionary reminder.

What did come before?

The first verse we heard today started, "When he had gone out." "When he had gone out," that's when Jesus described glory. When who had gone out? Judas. This passage comes towards the end of the Last Supper when Jesus knew that Judas was going out to betray him.

Love and betrayal. Jesus tells them to love as he loves -- right after Judas leaves to betray him.

'The Trouble with Love,' I discovered, early in my ministry, a pattern. Couples would come to me after say 11 years of marriage, at the end of their ropes. They would say things like, "he's not the man I married;" "she's changed." "I just married him to get away from my family. "I got married because it seemed like the right thing to do." "All our friends were doing it." It seems that either they hadn't known each other very well; or, in the flush of romantic love, they had overlooked flaws in their partners which reared their heads later.

But at the same time I was preparing couples for marriage. So I started asking couples planning their weddings why they wanted to get married, and, you know, none of them said, "I'm getting married because it seems like the right thing to do;" or "I'm marrying to get away from my family."

Rather it was, "because I love everything about him/her."

Since both things couldn't possibly be true, I got into the realm of Jungian psychology and Myers Briggs Type theory, to help couples to know themselves and each other better.

But even self-knowledge and knowledge of the other won't guarantee the permanence of love without forgiveness.

Back to The Big Bang Theory. Howard and Bernadette are telling each other what they love about each other. Howard says, "I love how I'm kind of a slob around here, and you're okay with that." And Bernadette says, "And I love how I work all day and then come home and do everything around here ... and you're okay with that." And on and on they go as the sarcasm and self righteousness escalate.

As people get to know each other better over time, their love for each other has the potential to grow. But it also has the potential to wither.

Well, God understands that too. And that's why, when Jesus offers us what we call the Lord's prayer, right after we pray for daily bread, we ask for forgiveness.

"Forgive us our trespasses. Forgive us our sins."

It follows "give us this day our daily bread," so it looks as if Jesus has figured out that we need forgiveness every day just as much as we need food every day.

It's probably a pretty good basis for loving relationships to try to see ourselves as God sees us, to search ourselves and to train ourselves to see our need for forgiveness; to break the big things into little things that we can work on: these are the keys to loving relationships.

Christian love is gained by these small steps of knowing oneself, resisting the urge to justify our actions, praying for forgiveness. And God promises us that we will know love.

And that is the glory: Love

That is the new heaven and new earth.

Love is Jesus' vision. Love indiscriminately. Love one another. That is the glory of God.