

Sermon for 5th Sunday after Easter, April 28, 2013

John 13:31-35

Blessings to you and **peace** from God the Father, our **risen** Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the **Holy** Spirit. Amen

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

When I moved up here to Riverside **last** August one of the **first** things that I did was to go **online** to the City of Riverside's **home** page and **sign** up for a number of **weekly** and **monthly** notices that they send out regarding **happenings** around the city; **things** to do, **updates** on the Riverside police department, what was happening in the **ward** I live in, and information on the **city** council-just to name a few. As someone who **only** knew Riverside as a town I would **drive** through on the **way** to somewhere else, I did not have **any** idea that this community had **so** much to offer in the way of events, culture, and ethnic diversity.

The **other** day I opened one of my emails entitled, "City Council Ward 3 Update" I began to read the **local** edition. Just under the banner of **beautiful** pictures of this city was a **quote** from Jean Vanier from the office of Community and Growth. The quote said, "**Community is a sign that love is possible in a materialistic world where people so often either ignore or fight each other. It is a sign that we don't need a lot of money to be happy--in fact, just the**

opposite.” I thought that was a pretty **profound** observation about being community. I also thought about how **nicely** it tied in with **not only** our gospel reading for today but **also** with our first reading for today as well.

As I **thought** about our readings for today a few of questions came to my mind because the times we **live in** today are **certainly** different than when Jesus lived but in **many** ways the issues are pretty similar. Questions like: **How** do we come together today as community in our world when 20% of the population claim “none” when they are asked if they have a religious preference and 88% of the people under 30 are unchurched? **How** do we come together today as community in this *materialist* world where people so often either ignore or fight each other like Jean Vanier wrote of? **How** do we come together today as community and **obey** Jesus’ command to love one another? **And:** Just **what** does it mean for us to be an *inclusive* Christian community in the 21st century as ones who are **called** to go out as disciples of Jesus to **love** one another as Jesus has **first** loved us?

In our **gospel** reading we step back in time before Jesus was arrested and are **reminded** of the time when Jesus gave His disciples a **new** commandment: **to love** one another as **He** had loved them AND by this expression of love for one another **everyone** would know that they were His disciples. In our reading from the Book of Acts Peter has an opportunity to **reflect** upon what this command meant from **this side** of the cross after Jesus’ death and resurrection.

In our first reading we found out that Peter was the **first** disciple to break the **barrier** between Jews and Gentiles. He **did so** under the direct command of God. Peter was getting some pretty intense criticism from the Jews in Jerusalem because he went to be with and ate with the Gentiles in the city of Joppa. He **explained** to the Jews what happened: that while he was in Joppa he saw a vision—a sheet came down, animals came down all kinds—clean and unclean—a voice told Peter to kill and eat, Peter **responded**, “By **no** means, Lord that is profane and unclean. Nothing profane or unclean has **ever** entered my mouth!”, the voice said, “What **God** has made clean, you **must not** call profane”, **three** times this happened, then everything went away—what a vision. WHEW!!!

Then Peter **continued** the story, three men came, sent him to him from Caesarea, the **Holy Spirit** told Peter to go with them, **no distinction** was made between them and us, six brothers also came, Peter entered a Gentile man’s house where he was told a story of an angel with a message who told them go to and get Peter so their whole household could be saved, the **Holy Spirit** came upon them, and Peter baptized the Gentiles. At the end of his story he said to the Jews, “If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” The Jews were **silenced**—what could they say to refute that question?/// Then, as now, it was all about what GOD was doing in the world. They praised God saying, “Then God has given

even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.” Remember: love one another as I have loved you **Jesus** commanded.

God has **given** this gift of repentance that **leads** to life to each and every one of us. **Repentance**—a sorrow for one’s sin, a change of heart that gives **new** direction to one’s life leading to trust in Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and a life that bears good fruits so we can give **praise** and **glory** to God. So here we are today because of **Peter’s** answer to God’s call **way back** then—we are a “Gentile” Christian community with **faith** in God and Jesus Christ.

God called Peter to go beyond his own community to **include** those people who in the past were considered the outsiders—to bring them in for the **sake** of Kingdom of God. The challenges Peter faced with the Jews are **not unlike** the challenges we face today within our own community as we face many of the **same** conditions and problems only on a more **global** scale.

From our readings for today—here is **one** answer to the questions again that I posed about becoming community in the face of the fact that today **20%** of the people today claim to have no religious affiliation and 88% under 30 are unchurched, about becoming community in our materialistic world where we either **ignore or fight** each other, about becoming community and obeying Jesus’ command to love one another, and about what it means for us to be an **inclusive**

Christian community in the 21st century as ones who are called **to go out** as disciples of Jesus and **love one another** as Jesus loves us.

It is the same answer that Peter answered the Jews that wanted to know **why** he went to be with and ate with Gentiles—**Who are we that we could hinder God?** That is it!!! We cannot hinder God's actions in the world. Let **God** do the work through us just like He reached the Gentiles through **Peter's** vision. After all, it is all about God anyway—**not us**. We are the **conduit** through which God's **mighty** acts are made visible.

So **here** we are. This year Eden is celebrating **125 years** of service to God and community. God is richly blessing us through our outreach and ministries. Let's **celebrate** how we are showing the **love** for community and each other that Jesus was talking with his disciples about. We have quilters who give away over 200 quilts a year, there are homeless lunches made weekly that go to LSS, we had a float in the Veterans Memorial parade, we will have VBS in July, we have an active preschool with a Christian basis, we have ladies groups, volunteers who answer phones—work on our church doors—fill our communion trays, we have a great group of youth and youth involvement, we have men who fix things around here, we have a lovely choir, God is sending us new members, we are growing in our community outreach as we support other agencies through our helping hands ministry, I given out --- food cards since the beginning of the year to those in need

from the community who come into my office, we help support the Lutheran Retreat Center on the Indian reservation in South Dakota, and there are so many other things that we do here at Eden to show **God's** love for the community and for each other. God has and continues to **richly** bless us.

Community is a sign that love is possible. God called Peter to go beyond his own community to include people who were in the past considered the outsiders—to bring them in for the sake of Kingdom. That is what we **here** at Eden are called to do also some 2,000 years later. God blesses us to overcome any challenges which come our way financial or otherwise. God blesses us to continue our mission to the community we serve no matter who or where the people are. May God **continue** to bless us as we move into the future with **confidence** knowing that where we go **God** goes with us. As disciples of Jesus Christ we **too** have received the **new** commandment to **love** one another just as **He** has loved us and by this **everyone** will know that we, also, are His disciples. All **thanks** be to God. **AMEN**