

Our Sacred Stories

Remembering Who We Are: Disciples of Love and Mercy

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. (John 13:34-35)

Memory marks us. The people we've met, the things we've done, the experiences we've had, these all help us to recognize who we are and what our lives are about. The Gospels express the memories of the first disciples. First it was orally passed on among the early followers of Jesus. Then after a time, these communities of Christians began to write these memories – those that they felt marked them as disciples and Christians. John's Gospel is one of these recordings.

Throughout the Easter Season we hear from John. In particular we focus on the experiences the first disciples had of the Risen Jesus. After Jesus had given himself up to death on the Cross, he continued to be present among these followers. This presence was not a physical presence, but it was just as real and meaningful. It was also a presence that led them to make sense of all that Jesus had passed onto them. They became aware of what we have come to call the Paschal Mystery (the life, death, resurrection and continuing presence of Jesus). It led them to commit themselves to his mission.

The experience of the risen Jesus deeply changed the disciples. Fundamentally, they recognized that Jesus had sacrificed his life for them. Further, they came to see that his sacrifice went beyond them to all of humanity. Thus, they were on fire to proclaim this good news of his message and carry out his mission to the world.

The good news and message that the death and resurrection led them to see was that by laying down his life for them, Jesus revealed God's great love for all humanity. Jesus' resurrection and continued presence among them confirmed the disciples' awareness of the loving God revealed by Jesus while he walked and taught them. Now they knew firmly that God would never leave them, even in death.

What the disciples were now to do was share and proclaim what they had been given. The writer John speaks of a *new commandment* as the way in which the disciples will proclaim this good news of love. In another place, in a letter to fellow Christians, it is even more clearly proclaimed that God's love given to us leads to our loving one another:

This is the love I mean: not our love for God, but God's love for us when he sent his Son to be the sacrifice that takes our sin away.... We are to love, then, because he loved us first. (1 John 4:10, 19)

If we were looking for an expression of what this love of God looks like, we need look no further than Matthew's Gospel chapters 5-7 and Luke chapters 6-8. The beatitudes or blessings of these Gospels and the actions connected to them present a kind of epitome or summary of how we are to show God's love. It is a love that brings life to us and to our world. This was the mission of Jesus. Now it is our mission, for we are his disciples.

John Jennings
5th Sunday of Easter