

2020 SUMMER DEVOTIONAL

First Presbyterian Church, Greensboro, NC
fpcgreensboro.org

Week three



A New
Commandment

WEEK THREE
DAY ONE

Scripture & reflection

John 13:
31-35

Chapter 13 of the Gospel of John is a busy scene. The setting is the Last Supper and it lasts into night, starting with the iconic foot washing Jesus gives the disciples. The whole chapter is similar to a traditional farewell speech, one a religious leader would give on their deathbed, and as we know, Jesus is indeed about to die. The speech revolves around taking care of each other; all the while, Jesus is distressed about being betrayed by Judas. He eventually lets these feelings out in a vague way that only Judas understands, and then Judas runs off into the night.

Enter our text, verses 31-35. In truest Gospel of John form, Jesus hits us with what sounds like a tongue-twister or a riddle: “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify in himself and will glorify him at once.” We imagine that here Jesus is expressing that both God and Jesus are glorified, and their glorification is tied together. What makes this claim about glorification a little different is that it’s all tied up in a story of death and betrayal. In John’s Gospel, we see that these themes are all woven together.

And now for the big verse: “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.” Some people say this is central to the Gospel and most certainly to the Gospel of John, even more so than John 3:16. Kevin says it definitely is instructive as practical theology, and you can also poke at it some and bring up powerful questions. For instance: is this love universal? Can we really be commanded to love? Is love a gift, or a choice, or an unyielding reality? This scene of commandment is strikingly important: how do we live it out like Jesus is envisioning?

A key to answering these questions might be to take a step back and remember the reality that the denial and betrayal and death of Jesus are all tied together with his glorification as one who comes from God. Weeping at the death of his friend Lazarus in John 11, Jesus says, ‘No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.’ Jesus speaks about human-to-human love, in the midst of all the pain and suffering. God’s love is bound to it all. To love each other means to bear the denial, betrayal, and death that comes with human experience and to keep on, knowing that this is how God’s gift of love comes to us all. So how do we love? By loving with a love that expects it all from us, even in the face of denial, betrayal, and death.



“Jesus washes his disciples’ feet,” from a collective of Christian visual artists in Cameroon called JESUS MAFA.

John 13:34

“I give
you a new
commandment,
that you love
one another.
Just as I have
loved you, you
also should love
one another.”

Take in the painting, slowly moving your eyes over the image. Invite the Holy Spirit to be present with you in this exercise of visual devotion.

What do you notice when you look at the painting? What first stands out to you?

How do the colors and shapes in the painting make you feel? Does your eye gravitate towards a particular shape or color?

Read today’s scripture verse. Do you experience any resonances between the scripture and the image?

Pause. Breathe. Take in the image once more. Close your devotion time with a prayer, offering to God the prayers of thanksgiving and intercession that are on your heart this day.

WEEK THREE
DAY TWO

Visio divina

WEEK THREE
DAY THREE

Spiritual practice

Lectio divina

For this year's summer devotional, each week will include an invitation to a spiritual practice. We know that our faith deepens and broadens when we engage embodied practices that form us as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. We invite you this week into the practice of Lectio Divina.

This practice, literally "divine reading," is an ancient way of reading Scripture that originates from the prayerful reading practices of monastic communities. Below you will find the steps to engage this practice with the John text from this week, but you're encouraged to try it out with different Bible texts as you read scripture in the next several days. And if you find this practice lifegiving for you, remember that Rev. David Partington leads a weekly Lectio Divina group here at the church, which is currently meeting over Zoom; reach out to a member of the pastoral staff if you'd like to get involved.

Slowly read the scripture passage aloud, trusting that the Holy Spirit is present in the reading of God's word.

Pause after this first reading to sit in silence, letting the words of the text wash over you.

Read the passage aloud again. This time listen for a word or phrase that stands out to you. There are no wrong answers!

What was the word or phrase that you chose? Why do you think it was particularly present to you today?

Read the passage once more, silently. Ask God to reveal to you how this text might be calling you to live and move in the world.

Prayer

Offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the gifts that this scripture imparts.