

First Presbyterian Church
John 13:31-35, “What’s Your Real ID?”
by Pastor Matt Johnson, 5/18/2025

Every time you go on the internet, someone is trying to figure out who you are.
Not a conspiracy theory!

Whenever I open up an account, the site wants to make sure I am who I say I am.
I need to create an account, log in with my user name and password,
prove that I know what a fire hydrant looks like about 15 times,
and *then* punch in a secret code sent to my phone.
(And I’m not telling you what it is, they said not to share it.)

Legit internet sites want to know who you are to keep your information safe,
and that’s only necessary because there are also people
trying to steal your information.

It’s not just online, but now also on airplanes.
Used to be that the driver’s license was an accepted form of identification
just about everywhere we went, but on May 7th it became official
that you need a Real ID drivers license
to fly on a domestic flight in the US.

I’m curious – do you have your Real ID?
Anyone getting caught in the crunch as you prepare for summer travel?
I hope not, because it’s a big hassle.
But we want to make sure the right people are on the airplane, right?
So these IDs have to be verified from multiple sources,
and they get holograms put on them with a weird bird
and some plants and a map of Oregon’s counties,
and a star in the corner to show you’re legit.

It turns out that Jesus was way ahead of the ID verification game.
Here in John 13, Jesus declares that his disciples will be uniquely known
by their love.

And that was a great choice by Jesus, because it is an indisputable fact
that nobody in the world has any love at all except for disciples of Jesus.
So there’s an easy ID chart: Do they love? Yes – Disciple of Jesus.
No – Not disciple of Jesus.

I hope you know I'm being facetious here.

My point is that while love is a beautiful and inspiring identity marker
for Jesus' disciples, it could be argued that this makes it
more difficult to distinguish them in the world.
Because who doesn't love? Who in the world is against love?

But Jesus says that love is the criteria that will show the world that
those who follow by faith are Jesus' disciples.

I believe there are some indications in this passage
that Jesus does provide some more selective criteria
than we may notice at first glance.
Jesus has a particular kind of love
that, like a Real ID, is impossible to fake.
To see this, we're going to have to kind of back our way into it.

Love takes center stage at the beginning of our passage,
but a different topic is featured in the first few verses: glory.

"Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him.
If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself,
and will glorify him at once."

That's ... a lot of glory.
The glory is going in so many directions that sorting it out takes a while.
But in the end we see that there is a glorious inter-being between
God and the Son of Man, who is Jesus.

And this discussion of glory offers us a key to understanding
how Jesus' way of love is easily distinguishable
from other loves.

But to understand that, we need to take *another* step back.

In the earlier portion of John 13, Jesus shares with the disciples
that one of them will betray him.
As they sit together and eat, someone sharing in the bowl of hummus
with Jesus will turn him over for arrest, trial, and death.

According to v. 30, Judas takes the bread Jesus offers him, and leaves the room.

It was night.

So Judas betrays Jesus, leave the group of disciples, and the stage is set for Jesus' trial, torture, and death.

And with that all in place, Jesus says,
"Now the Son of Man is glorified."

Now? How could being betrayed and on your way toward an awful death possibly be called "glory"?

When someone is glorified, they are seen at their best,
in their purest and highest form.

And God's love and mercy were never more fully on display than in Jesus' choice to take on the sin of the world, to become sin for us,
through the cross.

The betrayal of Judas was the ignition of that process.

God was glorified in Christ through this.

And so, Jesus' use of the word "glory" must be understood
through the upside-down economy of God's kingdom.

Upside down when compared to the world.

The church has often confused the glory of Jesus with the glory of the world.

The results, when we get this wrong, are devastating.

When the glory of Jesus and the glory of the world are confused,
this is what it looks like:

Glory is Constantine, the emperor of Rome becoming Christian
and declaring Christianity an acceptable religion across the empire.

Glory is the incredible wealth of the papacy, resulting in immense cathedrals.

Glory is the arrival of Christianity on foreign shores delivered by colonists
who displace and dislocate native people and cultures.

Glory is the protestant work ethic and the creation of wealth, power, and influence.

Glory is God and country, being a nation of manifest destiny,
conquering heathens and establishing freedom from sea to shining sea.

Glory is a big presence on social media with lots of
followers and likes and pictures.

Glory is continuously generating sound bites in hopes that one might go viral
and inspire people for 15 minutes

before they go on with the rest of their lives.

Glory is church growth, big choirs, flashy videos, tight bands,
and charismatic preachers.

Glory is knowing the Truth with a capital T so that nobody
can ever question your doctrine.

The church that sees glory from this perspective has gone in for
triumphalism.

Triumphalism is faith that believes the church ought to demonstrate
the triumph of good over evil through success, prosperity, power,
acquisition, and growth.

Happiness, joy, healing, and living your best life
are always the order of the day.

And when the church understands glory in those terms,
there is no distinction to be made between the church
and anyone else in the human race.

On the other hand, the glory of Jesus
is found (shockingly and completely unexpectedly)
in betrayal and the way of the cross,
that offers a very clear mark of distinction
for followers of Jesus.

Jesus tells the disciples where his version of glory leads on the other side
of the cross: it leads to love.

The glory of God is on display in God's love for us
while we were yet sinners.

He said:

"A new command I give you: love one another.

As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

**By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,
if you love one another."**

Jesus' rejection of triumphalism was also a rejection of the powers of his day.
They wanted to triumph! They wanted a winner,

But the real ID of Jesus is self-sacrificial love that raises up others
rather than ourselves.

Humility expressed in self-giving love ...
that is what truly glorifies God.

That's how the world will know that they belong to God.
Not through growth and success and money and growth.

The world will see God's glory when it shown through self-giving love
that is *not* commonly on display.

In fact, we cannot love in this way unless the Spirit of God
enables us to do so.

What if you see this way of love out in the world, but the people aren't Christians?

Don't worry about it! Jesus didn't say

“they will know you are my disciples
by the labels you put on yourselves,
or by the building you worship in,
or by the theology that you proclaim.”

He said, “the world will know you are my disciples by your love.”

When we see Jesus-like love in the world, we can trust that Jesus is present.

It's not our job to control where the wind of the Spirit blows,
just to recognize the things that are aligned
with the glory of Jesus.

What if we see people loudly proclaiming their faith credentials,
and yet they harm people who are different, shame their opponents,
and boast of all they've accomplished?

Well, Jesus also said, “You will know a tree by its fruit.”

We can discern where God is at work without positioning ourselves in judgment.

If we're going to follow Jesus,

then we need to be prepared to be “glorified” like Jesus was.

If we live in openness to God's Spirit,
then the Spirit will put God's character on display through us
just as it was through Jesus.

That doesn't mean we *want* to suffer.

Even Jesus didn't *want* to suffer the weight of the cross.

It means we are willing to suffer
because we know that God suffers with us.

We are never alone when we love with the love of God.

And whether the world is piling it on with jeers and accusations,
or wondering what might have inspired people to live so selflessly,
the link to the one we serve will be apparent.

Choosing to forgive the one who has hurt you.

Seeking reconciliation with someone you harmed through a selfish choice.

Facing pressure and ridicule – maybe even a loss of funding –
for supporting people who are vulnerable in our society.

This happens when the Spirit of Jesus enlivens us and enables us

to be present with kindness and humility,

to admit that we aren't the people who have all the answers.

What happened to Jesus was the worst.

So, when the world is doing it's worst to you ...

to the people you care about ... to your neighbors ...

God can arrive in wonderful ways, truly glorious ways.