



Love One Another - Our Work

KATHLEEN RUSHTON traces Jesus's words and actions in John 13:31-35 showing him bringing a new unity among people through love.

The season of Easter focuses on the risen Jesus who empowers the people of God every day of the year.

The Sunday gospel readings for this period (Year C) are from John. Unlike the gospel characters, who did not have this Gospel in written form, the early Christian communities, from which this Gospel arose probably in the 90s, knew and experienced the risen Jesus. The post-Easter gospel readings show two ways in which people came into the family of faith after the resurrection. The first is *through the Holy Spirit* (eg, Jn 20:21-22; 14:23-29). And the second way is *through the work of the disciples* (Jn 21:1-19), which we will reflect on in John 13:31-35.

"That they may be one" (Jn 17:21)

In late first century following the disaster of the Roman

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War and destruction of the Temple, groups of Jews sought various solutions for their situation and these groups are reflected in John's Gospel.

In the first half of the gospel, Jesus moved among representatives of some of these groups who were in conflict with one another. His barrier-crossing ministry of reconciliation focused on finishing the works of God by creating a new community. In action, he sought to bring into practice what he was to pray later: "that they may be one" (Jn 17:21).

The first representative of a "solution" group was the nationalist Nathanael, the "true Israelite" who was searching for a new "King of Israel" (Jn 1:47). Both terms implied he was among those who sought a nationalist and political liberator to free them from Roman domination.

Jesus then moved to Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a "ruler of the Jews" and "the teacher of Israel" who came to him "by night" (Jn 3:1-21). He was from a group of secret believers.

Next we see Jesus with the woman of Samaria. Her despised people had long expected the Messiah (Jn 4:7-26).

Then Jesus is with the royal official of Herod the Tetrarch, the representative of those who put their heads down and colluded with Roman rule (Jn 4:46).

19 May Fifth Sunday After Easter: John 13:31-35

"Whatever the father does, the son does" (Jn 5:19)

Against the background of the Genesis creation story, this Gospel places great emphasis on God as ongoing creator and sustainer of all life. Kinship also permeates the context of the time of Jesus. A father provided all that was needed for life. In this context the image of father unfolds as an image for God as creator and sustainer of life. This Johannine Gospel's father-son relationship was influenced by and embedded in first-century social conventions. The total dependence of a son on a father socially, economically and culturally led to the understanding that a son was the most suitable agent to attend to the father's business. This is captured in a hidden parable which gives a glimpse of a son apprenticed to his father's trade (Jn 5:19-20a). The son watches his father working and imitates him. Crafts were hereditary and passed down from father to son. Jesus was a carpenter and a carpenter's son.

"To finish the works of God" (Jn 4:34)

The images of God working and Jesus working abound. The works of Jesus testify that he is sent by God (Jn 5:37-38). He is to "finish the works of God" (Jn 5:36), which include healing the marginalised. The works of God are to come to completion in Jesus. This is especially so as his death approaches (Jn 19:28) and in his last words on the cross: "It is finished" (Jn 19:30). Jesus's food is to *finish* the works of God (Jn 4:34). Jesus speaks of God doing works through him (Jn 14:10) and of how those who believe in him "will do the works that I do and, in fact, greater works than I do" (Jn 14:12).

"Good works" and "evil works" were not general expressions at this time. According to Jose Miranda they were "a precise technical term referring to helping those in need".

"I am with you only a little longer" (Jn 13:33)

Judas went out. It was night (Jn 13:30). Jesus was with his disciples – although their weakness would soon be revealed, they intended to remain true and loyal. The departure of Judas began the movement towards the death of Jesus.

Throughout John, Jesus spoke of his death-resurrection in many images. Some are taken from creation or daily life such as the grain of wheat and the shepherd laying down his life for his sheep. Other images are abstract such as "glorification" which indicated that his death-resurrection was underway. There are five references in Jn 13:31-32 to the mutual glorification of God and Jesus which span the past, the present and the future in ways which are hard to unravel. In the biblical tradition, "glorify" is associated with the unseen presence of God in the saving event of the Exodus. While Jesus's glorification is being brought about by betrayal and execution, the heart of "glory" or "glorify" centres on the revelation of God in the person and life of Jesus.

The intimacy and love which exists between Jesus and his disciples is expressed by the endearing term, "little children" (Jn 13:33). And the repetition of phrases such as "only a little longer" and "I am going" suggest a sense of loss and grief. Jesus was returning to God. The disciples cannot follow and experience his absence keenly. As the discourse unfolds we learn what will be done to meet this new situation.

"Just as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34)

Jesus gives the disciples a new commandment of love (Jn 13:34-35). The loss of the love of the physical presence of Jesus is to be compensated by the love they are to have for one another. Jesus had given them loving action as a paradigm for how they are to love – he washed their feet (Jn 13:1-17). Disciples are to do likewise.

The commandment of love was already in place (Lev 19:18). What was new is that after Jesus's departure the disciples are to live love to such a degree that "everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35). The measure of this love is new: "just as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34). This is in direct continuity with the love that they have received from Jesus. He has spoken repeatedly about finishing the works of God. Disciples are to continue this work by their love for one another.

We face a new time in Aotearoa New Zealand. At the national memorial service for victims of the Christchurch massacre, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said: "We each hold the power [to combat hate], in our words and our actions, in daily acts of kindness. Let that be the legacy of 15 March." Survivor Farid Ahmed said: "I want a heart that is full of love and care, and full of mercy, a heart that will forgive lavishly." In our new time we are to move on to finish the works of God by creating new ways in word and action to "love one another just as I have loved you".

Painting: *The Washing of the Feet* by John August Swanson © Used with permission www.johnaugustswanson.com



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