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 Year C Easter 5 May 15, 2022  
 Grace Episcopal Church, Alexandria Virginia  
 Gospel of John 13:31-35

It's a bit confusing that in Eastertide, our lectionary takes us back to Holy Week. It is Thursday, a night so important that John uses 5 chapters to tell us about it. Prior to the part we hear today, Jesus had just washed the feet of the disciples. He had returned to the table and revealed that one of them will betray him. Our passage begins with Judas walking out.

The circle has been broken. The events that will ultimately glorify God are now flowing out from that breach of trust. The disciples may be perplexed, but Jesus knows what is happening and he knows there is not much time. So now that Judas is gone, and time is short, what does Jesus do? He pulls the disciples closer. The Lukan image of Jesus as the mother hen and her chicks under wing comes to my mind. It's the Gospel we heard back in the beginning of Lent when Jesus lamented over Jerusalem. Now Jesus pulls his faithful disciples under his wing to give them "the talk". It's the talk about how they are going to survive as a group in the face of what is coming. Afterwards, how they will thrive in their callings to God's plan. Jesus calls them "little children" not to be diminutive but to tenderly beckon them in a way that acknowledges that they are young in the faith. As a loving parent, Jesus coaches them about how to maintain their focus, their stability and their identity in the times to come when he won't physically be there with them any longer.

This "talk" is called the New Commandment, or the Love Commandment, or the Farewell Commandment. When I started to teach about it with the Grace School 5<sup>th</sup> graders, a girl interrupted me by blurting out "Love your neighbor as yourself!" That is indeed a commandment about love, but from Leviticus. We hear it in the Summary of the Law, but it's not what Jesus taught his beloved disciples that night. "Love one another as I have loved you" is really a plea from Jesus who loves us not as himself but more than himself. Right? Why else would he have died for us? That night it is a call to prepare to hold together in that same selfless love.

In this little window of time, Jesus speaks to his disciples about what is most important: In his absence, they are to abide in his love by being that love to each other. As if Jesus is saying, remember all I have done in our time together. Remember the words and actions, and how they made you feel. Find yourself in my example and copy me in your ways. Through your own love, make me present. Don't just talk about me, but live in a way that shows the world the meaning of my sacrifice for you.

Love others selflessly, as I have selflessly loved you.  
 Empathize with others, as I have empathized with you.  
 Be patient with others, as I have been patient with you.  
 Care for other others, as I have cared for you.  
 Stick with others, as I have stuck with you.  
 Feed others, as I have fed you.

When we love one another in these ways, we connect with how the disciples felt in the presence of the Lord. When those feelings become a part of us, they come out in everything we say and do. In this way, we show the world that true glory is divine love and compassion. It simply becomes who we are through our baptism. This is why we hear of this night during Eastertide. It is as if Jesus is saying: "Little children, love each other. This is how the world will know you are mine. This is how the confused world will know the truth about real glory."

We have all been in that upper room where we feel perplexed. We fear that a circle has been broken and we don't know what is going to happen next. Maybe there has been an argument, or you are up after midnight waiting for your teenager to get home. You may be waiting for test results, or a court decision, or an update from a friend. We are all holding our breath with concern for our world impacted by disease, conflict and climate change. How bad will it be? Fear and anxiety tries to pull us apart. But that's not what we were made for.

Here's is someone who lives you is living into the New Commandment. No it's not Mother Teresa or Oscar Romero. It's a saint with a lower case s, like you and me, but in an extreme situation. Her name is Anna Melnyk. She is 16 years old and the Washington Post ran her story on the front page last Wednesday. Anna was a typical teen living in Kyiv with all her typical teen concerns until February 24. When she, her mother, her grandmother, and her dog and cat fled to Lviv, Anna resisted the opportunity to go live with friends in Maryland. Instead she stayed and she volunteers at the local train station, helping displaced people who are fleeing the warzones. She does what she can, which is to comfort and guide people, even though as the Post writer says, "she looks impossibly small not just in the cavernous train station but also amidst the giant war machine that has turned a generation of young people into adults overnight."

Worry and fear can draw us inward, even into self-isolation. But that's not what this ordinary teen chose to do. Her circle was broken so she jumped right with love in her heart for those who were placed in front of her. Anna's grandmother is quoted as saying, "Life is full not when you are rich or you have everything you need, but when you do what you are meant to do. Anna makes her own way and we don't stop her." Anna is living into her baptism, and I don't think they could stop her if they tried.

Jesus's prescription for us today is the same that he had for the disciples and the challenges they would soon face. "Be me with each other. Receive my love from each other. Be the wing of the mother hen and chick held tight. Embody the meaning of my sacrifice with each other and you will know what is true glory. Love one another as I have loved you. For this you were baptized."

And now let us turn to baptizing and welcoming a new member into the household of God.