

Fifth Sunday of Easter - May 19, 2019, Year C  
**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 13:31-35

***"Focused on Jesus"***

The setting for today's Holy Gospel reading is in the upper room on that Thursday night, where the Apostles met with Jesus to celebrate the Passover Seder meal. The Gospel begins with the words "*When he was gone, Jesus said;*" were you wondering who he was? Did you find that troublesome, picking up in a reading, "*When he was gone,*" The he was Judas. Judas had just left the upper room and he went to go do what he had planned to do. Jesus told him "go do what you must do, and do it quickly" – and that is betray Jesus- strangely enough with a kiss.

John recorded Jesus' words this way: Jesus said, "*Now is the Son of Man 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.*" (John 13:31-32) Jesus knew what was coming and for this reason He speaks of being glorified. This is only the second time that Jesus spoke of "the Son of Man" being glorified. The first was in John 12:23 when Jesus said, "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*" Prior to this Jesus had spoken of God the Father being glorified and of the "Son of Man" being lifted up, which meant being on the cross. In the first century Israel the words to "glorify" means to exalt by completing the task, or to show the nature of something by bringing it to fruition. It is always good to know the context of how words are being used. The scope and wonder of God's marvelous plan of salvation will only be apparent with Jesus' arrest, His suffering, death and resurrection. I believe that Jesus was overwhelmed with glory, with the coming events as the unveiling of God's glory, with His own mission finally coming toward its conclusion, and so in doing that He would be bringing God the Father the glory. He knew that very soon He would be leaving His Apostles and His disciples behind as He moved closer and closer to the cross. If you think about it – Jesus is just hours away from His own death.

I have to wonder why the world gets so excited about fictitious characters coming to an end but let's face it – when it comes to Jesus' fulfilling His mission of sacrifice in order to bring eternal life and forgiveness to believers – it is treated as "old hat." 'Oh, OK, that is just Jesus and the cross.' Just look at the last month and the excitement surrounding the end of the 12 year "Big Bang Theory" - the television show. News of this has been everywhere; they have been interviewing Sheldon and Leonard and Penny. People have been wondering 'what was Penny's maiden name?' They never told you in 12 years! And then let's not overlook the movie "Avengers Endgame." There has been a lot of hubbub about that, with the sacrifice of certain characters and the build up to them was very big on the news. I promise there are no spoilers being given here. I am not going to tell you what happened with either the TV show or the movie.

Only around Easter is the life of Jesus and His sacrifice remembered in the news, and unfortunately on the minds of very few. Let's not forget all of the talk about the ending of "Game of Thrones!" I have never seen even one show, so I cannot even speak of it, but there was so much on TV and social media about these things. I have to admit I have seen all of the Avengers movies, Captain America, and I think I have seen every episode of the Big Bang Theory at least twelve

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times, because they are on reruns. Those characters will never die! Jesus died and rose from the dead – but it doesn't seem to excite a lot of people – only the ones in churches. There is a whole lot more people in the world. Absolutely amazing. Priorities are pretty mixed up in my opinion. I must admit I have spent time watching TV shows – and thank the Lord for a DVR so I can watch and record things and see it later. It used to be that people would stop dead in their tracks to go and watch a TV show. Remember 'Who Shot J.R. on "Dallas?" People would say 'sorry I have got to go!' You didn't want to see it in reruns, you wanted to see it right away. If you were fortunate enough to spend \$1,000 for a Video Cassette Recorder, it was that much money when they first came out, then you could have watched it. Nowadays 'I will just DVR it.' In my heart Jesus is always glorified, and I am sure on your hearts too. My point is – the media and the masses priorities are not focused on Jesus – but on a lot of other things. Just watch the news – I don't care which news, which channel, nobody is talking about Jesus very much.

Jesus knows on that night, the events that are coming for Him, and He tells them warmly and lovingly, in a way that reflects their relationship with one another: *"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come."* (John 13:33) In just a little while Jesus will repeat this, telling them more about His destination in John 14. His words are filled with promise and truth. *"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."* Thomas said to him, *"Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"* Jesus answered, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."* (John 14:2-7) That last verse is very important – because a lot of time people will stop with *"I am the way and the truth and the life,"* and sometime throw in *"No one comes to the Father except through Me."* Hardly ever do people add *"If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."* In other words Jesus was saying 'right here – you are looking at God.' Jesus promises that they will not be alone, that He will come back for them and take them that they will always be with Him. Thomas pipes up that they don't know the way, and Jesus fill them and all believers with those special words that fully reveal just who He is and how He and the Father are One! I can't help but think of the prayer that is called the Shema, that is ingrained in the hearts and minds of the Jewish people, as well as on their door posts, rolled up as a small scroll and placed in a mezuzah. It is Deuteronomy 6:4-6 *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts."* That is God speaking to Moses in Deuteronomy.

Jesus has something special to give to the Apostles besides the gift of His Body and Blood in the Eucharist at the Last Supper Seder meal. Jesus gives them the simplest, clearest and truly the hardest command of all - as a new Commandment that is to go along with the Shema, that is

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straight from God's words in Leviticus 19:18 in which God tells Moses: "*Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD*" And so Jesus tells His Apostles, "*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*" (John 13:34-35) This is perhaps the hardest thing for them to follow, because Jesus is telling them, and all believers to copy Him – which is virtually impossible, but we are to try.

At the very beginning of each Holy Eucharist service we have incorporated Jesus' words and these two commands as recorded in Matthew 22:37-40. You know these, and just heard them: "Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ says, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.*"

Let's face it, love is not about us, but is all about what we give and do for the other person. Think about that. You can be in love, but you are not in love with yourself, at least I hope you are not. If you love someone else then don't you want to do what is best for that person, and give a part of yourself for that person? Selfless love overflows into service, not in order to show off how hard working it is, but because true love for one another is its natural form. Everything we think do and say is for that person while we are with them. Sadly, we can look at human history and see how professing Christians have treated one another through the years. Some have used the Gospel as a weapon. It would be my prayer that that will not be the future of the church, but instead that the Gospel would be an example of a love like no other that begins with God and extends to our neighbors.

It would also be my hope that we would remember Jesus' words from today's Holy Gospel and that they give us strength, hope and courage to do just what He commands: "*By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*" (John 13:35) The Apostle Paul's words from 1 Corinthians 13:13 go right alongside to complement Jesus' words as well as those of the Old Testament as he wrote, "*And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*" And so by the grace of God may we do our best to put these words into action – and through our love, being fully focused on the One who loves us, and His Name is Jesus.