

Sermon 19 May 2019 Sacrificial Service

John 13:31-35

This short discourse from Jesus takes place at the conclusion of the Last Supper. In a sense, it is the beginning of his farewell talks to the disciples. He is explaining to them that he is going away, that he is leaving them, and at the same time, he issues them with a directive as to how they should carry out their mission. He speaks, of course, about love. This love will underpin their ministry and also prove to the world that they are indeed his disciples.

An important part of this short farewell discourse is Jesus proclaiming that not only is he about to enter into God's glory, but that God will receive glory, not only through everything Jesus has done, but also what is going to happen to him. He is clearly referring to the cross, the massive sacrifice he makes in going to the cross, but at the moment this is beyond the understanding and comprehension of the disciples. An important point here is that the glory he speaks about is linked very much to the love he commands them to put into practice. I will come back to that connection in a minute.

Jesus begins with words, *'The time has come for me, the Son of Man, to enter into my glory'*, and a little further on, *'And God will bring me into glory very soon.'* So he was very aware of what lay ahead of him, and the fact that he would eventually be seated by God in heaven. It was something the disciples never really cottoned on to until they saw his resurrection and then his ascension with their own eyes. How does the expression go? 'Seeing is believing'. Unfortunately, faith does not really allow us that luxury.

It has to be said, the disciples were reluctant believers. It was only when they experienced the risen Christ that they took on that unshakeable faith which then enabled them to carry out their ministry and so lay the foundations of our church today. But then, I think we are all, to some extent, reluctant believers. We want proof.

Jesus also said, *'God will receive glory because of all that happens to me.'* I don't want to go into this in too much detail, suffice to say that Jesus makes it so much easier for us to understand the nature of God. It was only through the Resurrection that we are able fully grasp the fact that Jesus is indeed God, and so we see God through the human eyes of Jesus. God is revealed to us.

So we come back to the point that the glory Jesus speaks about is linked to the love he commands us to practise. This glory Jesus refers to can only come about through his

sacrifice. That's what the cross is all about. In the same way, the love we are beholden to practise just has to involve an element of sacrifice. I just cannot see it in any other way. Last week we celebrated Mothers Day. Why is Mothers Day so special? Simply because a mother's love is unconditional and will always involve a significant degree of sacrifice. It just goes with the territory. I do not believe that you can have love without sacrifice. I want to share with you a true story as related by a cab driver in a large American city. The story doesn't actually specify which city, but that is immaterial. Some years ago this cab driver, whose name is Kent, arrived in the middle of the night for a pick up at a building that was dark except for a single light in a ground floor window. Under these circumstances, many drivers would just honk once or twice, wait a couple of minutes, then drive away. It was not a particularly safe neighbourhood. But Kent had seen too many impoverished people who depended upon taxis as their only means of transportation. Unless a situation smelled of danger, he always went to the door. Who knows, it could be someone who required some assistance. So he walked to the door and knocked. 'Just coming,' answered a frail voice. He could hear something being dragged across the floor. After a long pause, the door opened. A small, elderly woman stood before him. By her side was a small suitcase. The apartment looked as if no one had lived in it for years. All the furniture was covered with sheets. There were no clocks on the walls, nothing on the shelves. In the corner was a cardboard box filled with photos and glassware. 'Would you carry my bag out to the car?' she asked. Kent took the suitcase to the cab, then returned to assist the woman out to the car. She kept thanking him for his kindness. When they got into the cab she gave him an address and then asked, 'Could you please drive me through downtown?' 'It's not the shortest route,' he answered. 'Oh, I don't mind,' she answered, 'I am on my way to a hospice.' Kent looked at her in the rear vision mirror. There were a few tears in her eyes. 'I don't have any family left,' she said. 'The doctors tell me I don't have a huge amount of time left.' Kent quietly reached over and turned the meter off. 'What route would you like to take?' he asked. For the next two hours they drove through the city. She showed him the building where she once worked as an elevator operator. They drove through the neighbourhood where she and her husband had lived as newlyweds. Sometimes she asked him to slow down in front of a

particular building and she would sit staring into the darkness, saying nothing.

As dawn approached, she suddenly said, 'I am tired. Let's go now.' They drove in silence to the address she had given him. It was a low building, like a small convalescent home. Two orderlies came out and helped her into a wheelchair. Kent dropped her suitcase at the door and she said to him, 'How much do I owe you?'

'Nothing,' he said. 'But you have to make a living,' she answered. 'There will be other passengers'. Then he bent down and gave her a hug. 'You gave an old woman a little moment of joy,' she said. 'Thank you so very much.'

Kent squeezed her hand and walked slowly to his car. He didn't pick up any more passengers that shift. He drove aimlessly, lost in thought. What if he had honked his horn a couple of times, waited a short time and then driven away? It occurred to him that he probably hadn't done anything more important in his life. In the large scheme of things, it was a very small sacrifice he made but what a massive difference it made in the life of that one person.

That, my friends, is the whole point of this story. All too often we are far too busy to make even small sacrifices. But we should never, never underestimate the impact that a thoughtful gesture, a kind act, a small sacrifice can make. We can touch hearts, make someone feel wanted, valued. We can give someone a lift in a way that we wouldn't think possible. And that is what Jesus had in mind when said, '*Love one another.*' And that is how we bring glory to God. We can all do it, every single one of us.

Let me finish with a quote from Mother Teresa: '*We shall never know all the good that a simple act of kindness can do.*'