

Sermon 18 May 2025 Sacrificial service

Romans 12:1-2 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 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 that Jesus has done, but also through what is going to happen to him. *'The time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory, and God will be glorified because him.'* John 13:31. 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 comprehension and understanding 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 in a moment.

Jesus 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 his 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, as we have explored, 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 foundation of our church today. But then, I think we are all, to some extent and at some point, reluctant believers. We want proof.

Jesus also said, *'...and God will be glorified because of him,'* referring to himself. I don't want to go into this in too much detail, suffice to say that Jesus makes it much easier for us to understand the nature of God. It was only through the Resurrection that we are able to 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 of God Jesus speaks about is linked to the love he commands to practise. This glory Jesus refers to can only come about through 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 cannot see it any other way.

Last week we celebrated Mothers Day. Why is Mothers Day so special? Because a mother's love is unconditional and will always involve a degree of sacrifice. It just goes with the territory. I do not believe that you can have love without sacrifice. To illustrate this, I want to share with you a true story as related by a cab driver in a large American city.

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 on taxis as their only means of transport. Unless a situation smelled of danger, he always went to the door. Who knows, it could be someone who required 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 was nothing on the walls, nothing on the shelves. In the corner was a cardboard box filled with photos and glassware.

'Would you please carry my bag out to the car?' she asked. Kent took the suitcase to the car, then returned to assist the woman out to the car. She kept thanking him for his kindness.

When they got into the car 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 said, 'I'm on my way to the 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 said, 'I'm 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 replied. 'But you have to make a living,' she answered. 'There will be other passengers.' Then he bent down and gave her a hug. She said, 'You have given an old woman a little moment of joy. Thank you so 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 small sacrifice he had 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 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 this is simply what Jesus had in mind when he said, 'Love one another.' This is simply what he had in mind when he said, 'Love your neighbour.' And that is how we bring glory to God. We can all do it.

Rick Warren, author and theologian said, *'Sacrifice is the essence of love, which is the essence of God.'* I refer to our first reading from Romans: *'And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice – the kind he will find acceptable.'* Romans 12:1.

The last word goes to author, Quinn Loftis, who wrote, *'Love is not just a feeling, it's a commitment and above all, a sacrifice.'* That, my friends, is what Christ expects from us.