**May 19, 2019 John 13:31-35**

 ***What Is God Like?***

**Scripture:** John 13:31-35 NRSV

 (31)When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. (32)If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. (33)Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' (34)I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. (35)By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

**Notes:**

1. What is God’s ***Character*** like?
	1. Humble and takes on the responsibilities of ***slave***.
	2. No act of ***service*** is beneath him.
	3. Humbly serves a friend, knowing they will ***betray***.
	4. Humbly serves a friend, knowing they will ***deny*** knowing him.
	5. Chooses to be revealed to the world through the ***example*** of his friends.
2. Would you be willing to be identified by your ***friends***?
	1. There is a fine line between being ***influential*** and being ***influenced***.
	2. Our call to ***love*** requires us to be influencers.
3. Who do people see when they look at ***you***?
	1. Do they see an ***influencer*** or somebody who is ***influenced*** by the world
	2. Come to Jesus and make him ***first*** ***priority*** of your life
	3. Develop a devotional time and work on your ***spiritual*** ***disciplines***.
	4. Create new ***relationships*** with others who are like minded
	5. Make attending ***services*** and other meetings at the church a priority
4. We must love one another in the same way that ***Jesus*** showed his love for us.
	1. When people look at you, do they see ***God***?
	2. All it takes for us to show God to others is to ***share*** what we have.

**Transcript:**

After my sister, Karen’s passing I spent a lot of time reflecting on our life together as siblings. I remembered a lot of good times, but there was some guilt hidden in there as well; guilt that came from times when I was mean and hateful to her; things that I did that were very selfish, things that I did that had a negative impact on her. And as I look back on those time as a child, when I gave her a black eye, when I told on her for things she did, I wonder how I could truly say that I loved her, and she was my sister; I was supposed to be her big brother and her protector. So as I read this passage today I look at the latter part of the passage and think that I missed it when I was younger. I am a bit embarrassed to say that it took me almost 30 years to finally get it.

You see, we are commanded by Christ to love one another. We are commanded to love each other, to love all of humanity, even when we do not know them on a personal level. We are commanded to demonstrate this love in the same manner as Christ showed this love to us.

And this brings me wonder, What is God like; that he would call us to do such a thing; that he would ask us to open ourselves up to ridicule and contempt; that he would ask us to love people who are unlovable and not worthy of our attention let alone our affection.

Are you hearing the words I am saying today? Do these words sound familiar? Because we live in a world that asks those very same questions when we expect them to extend grace and love to somebody they do not know. Look with me, at these words of Jesus found in John 13:31-35.

 (31)When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. (32)If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. (33)Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' (34)I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. (35)By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:31-35 NRSV

What is God’s Character like? Many people wonder this very question. Some think they can explain it, while others declare they can’t even comprehend how it is possible.

I heard a story the other day about a boy who wondered this as well. A little boy wanted to meet God. Not knowing where God lived, the boy packed his suitcase with Twinkies and a six-pack of root beer and started out on his journey. When he had gone a few blocks, he met an old woman who was sitting in the park staring at some pigeons. The boy sat down next to her and opened his suitcase. He was about to take a drink from his root beer when he noticed that the old lady looked hungry, so he offered her a Twinkie. She accepted it and smiled at him. Her smile was so pretty that the boy wanted to see it again, so he offered her a root beer. Once again she smiled at him. The boy was delighted! Together they sat all afternoon eating and smiling.

As it grew dark, the boy realized it was time to go home, but before he had gone more than a few steps, he turned around and ran back to the old woman and gave her a hug. She gave him her biggest smile ever.

When the boy opened the door to his own house a short time later, his mother was surprised by the look of joy on his face. She asked him, "What did you do today that made you so happy?" He replied, "I had lunch with God." But before his mother could respond, he added, "You know what? She's got the most beautiful smile I've ever seen!"

Meanwhile, the old woman, also radiant with joy, returned to her home. Her son was stunned by the look of peace on her face and he asked, "Mother, what did you do today that made you so happy?" She replied, "I had Twinkies and root beer with God, and you know, he's much younger than I expected."

We all have our own preconceived ideas of what God is truly like; some believe him to appear as an older man with a long flowing beard. They get offended when we even suggest that God is a woman. Some believe Him to of the caucasian race, and they are deeply offended when we suggest that his skin color might be darker. But the truth be told, those who have seen God, have never said whether he is a male or female, whether he has light skin or dark or if he even has any form at all, and whether he looks young or old. But the physical attributes of God do not come to mind when we hear this commandment. The real question comes to how God could love a sinful world so much that he would send his son to die as a sacrifice to save it.

We all gather here today seeking something, but I wonder how many here are seeking practical ways to be more service-oriented. I imagine there may a few but I think we seek other things. Some may be seeking ways to battle the image you have of yourself in your mind, seeking ways to walk closer with God without making a lifelong commitment to ministry, looking for answers to the hurts you are dealing with, looking for relief from the pressures of this world and the expectations of others.

What is God’s character like? Let’s take a look at God’s character today in order that we may better understand how we are able to love one another as God has loved us, or more so how Jesus has loved us.

God is one who humbles himself, and He takes on the responsibilities of slave. We think of the same night Jesus spoke these words. He did this very thing when he put on an apron, He knelt down and washed the disciples feet; not because he was asked to, not because he was required to, but because it needed done. I wonder have we humbled our self?

God is one for whom no act of service is beneath him. Remember when John baptized Jesus, he said no Rabbi, it is I who should be baptized by you. And Jesus said no it must be done, even though he was God in the flesh. He knew that he needed to baptized by water, in order to set the example.

God is one who humbly serves a friend, knowing that friends will betray him. He loved Judas even though he knew what Judas was about to do. In fact he encouraged him to go and do what must be done. And I am certain that if Judas would have repented of his sin; his greed, his betrayal, and who knows what other sin was in his heart. I am certain Jesus would have forgiven him and brought him back into good standing with God.

God is one who humbly serves a friend, knowing that friends will deny even knowing him. We all know who we are talking about here. Let us not forget Peter’s denial of Jesus; but also, let us not forget their walk on the sand weeks later. Jesus loved Peter enough to forgive him, and he did forgive him for every time he was denied. But He didn’t wait for Peter to get the nerve to come to him, He came to Peter and initiated the conversation. Could we be so forgiving? And could we be so direct as to forgive somebody without being asked to?

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

What do Jesus’ words reveal about God’s character? *What is God like?* God is one who chooses to be revealed to the world through the example of his friends. He is revealed by the love his followers have for one another; He is revealed by the love they show to their fellow followers; He is revealed by the love they show to their friends and neighbors; He is revealed by the love they show to strangers in the street; He is revealed by the love they show to those who are not deserving or worthy; He is revealed by the love they show to those who are difficult to love. These are easy things to say, but they are much more difficult to live out. Yet God chooses to be identified by the actions of those who call themselves Christians; He stakes His reputation on my actions, and your actions and the way we live our lives.

How can we do that, live out a God like existence, loving others as God has loved us? This is only the beginning point of reflecting on much more profound truths about God. What does it say of God that he continually chooses to be revealed through the lives of his people, through our actions? This is a worthy question to ponder, especially during these weeks after Easter.

How many of you would be willing to be identified by the friends you keep? Would you be willing to risk your reputation on the friends you have; the people with whom you most closely associate? Or more specifically, by how you act when you are with them.

I had a friend who was once told if you run with the wolves you howl with the wolves. And when my friend was told this, the wolves they were referring to, was me. What example was I setting for my friend at the time, or better yet what did the person making the analogy see in my example and life. He was being judged by the fact that he was associating with me.

Here is the thing, there is a fine line between being influential and being influenced. Yes when we associate with people we have the potential to be an example. We can influence the way they talk. We can influence the way they act. We can influence the way they think. But likewise it goes both ways, they can also influence you as well.

They can influence the way you talk, the way you act, and the way you think. In some cases they can be used by the evil one to tear down your self-discipline; causing you step over the line of what is right and decent. Leading you down a slippery slope into sin.

Remember when Jesus was foretelling his death; Peter took him aside and said, “Never Lord, this shall never happen to you.” Jesus responded to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” (Matthew 16:23 NRSV) Peter is trying to influence Jesus, Peter does not want to see the events that Jesus is speaking of, Peter wants things to remain the way they are. But Jesus knows the heart of God, and Jesus knows the heart of Peter, and Jesus knows the words Peter is sharing is not of God. His thoughts are of worldly thinking, so Jesus addresses the one from whom these thoughts are coming. Get behind me Satan. Stop influencing Peter and stop trying to influence me!!! But this did not change the way Jesus loved Peter; Peter was still the rock, and their relationship would continue on.

Part of our call to love one another requires us to be influencers. And we cannot be influencers for Jesus Christ: unless we are influenced by his word, listening to him, and being obedient; unless we have been saved; unless we are living our life in accordance with his will, for all to see; unless we are living our life as an example for all; unless we are sharing our love for Christ with others; unless we are sharing God’s love with others. But we must not allow the outside influences of the world to influence us; we must stand firm in our faith, and do our best to influence those we are drawn to, and resist the influence of those who tend to distract us and draw us away from God.

We too, like Jesus must love everybody we meet in the same manner as Jesus, by seeing the individual in the same manner as God sees that person. Yes we are called to Love one another; we are not only called to it, but expected to do it. As Jesus has loved us, so shall we love one another, but this is not a command you keep with only those who love you back. The hard part is loving the ones who are difficult to love, the ones who do not love you back, the ones who are so full of hate and hurt, the ones who push you away every time you try to get close.

Who do people see when they look at you? Do they see the you that follows Christ; the one who is influenced by his words and actions; the one who lives for Jesus in everything; the one who shares Jesus love with all you encounter; the one who shares your love for Jesus in everything you do; or do they see somebody else? Do they see somebody who proclaims to be a Christian but lives in a way that would make people doubt it? Do they see the person who is represented by your social media accounts? Do they see a person whose language is a little rough around the edges? Do they see somebody whose lifestyle is a little promiscuous? Do they see somebody who is greedy and concerned with stuff? Do they see somebody who is filled with hate and contempt? Do they see an Influencer or somebody who is influenced by the world?

Who do you see when you look in the mirror? If you cannot say that you see somebody that follows Christ, then we must work at making that right. Come to Jesus and make him the first priority of your life, ask Jesus to forgive you of your sin, ask him to enter into your heart and begin to clean it of all that is there, ask him to guide you through each day so that you may come to know him better.

When you do this you will join the I Am Second group, a group of people who place Jesus first and put themselves second. If you don’t have one, develop a devotional time and work on your spiritual disciplines. Focus on prayer, bible reading and other devotional activities.

Create new relationships with others who are like minded. Join a small group if you are not already part of one. Find another experienced follower of Christ who can mentor you. And don’t let the term mentor scare you from being a mentor or finding one. A mentor is nothing more than a person who you can rely on to share your experiences with, to hold you accountable and encourage you when things are difficult.

Make attending worship services and other meetings at the church a priority. If you are not surrounding yourself with strong positive role models, you are then surrounded by those who are not. Who are you influencing and who is influencing you? Then work on sharing your love for Christ with others, show the love of Christ to others as well. As you grow in your spiritual walk you will find that it gets easier each and every day.

We must love one another in the same way that Jesus showed his love for us. We can do this by caring for the elderly, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, giving aide to those who are in need, nursing the sick and injured, encouraging those who are discouraged, lifting up those who have fallen, and showing the way for those who are lost. We do this in our actions and in our words, including written, verbal and those on social media. But we also show it in the way we live our life.

I think back to the story of the boy who wanted to meet God. When people look at you, do they see God? And who are you in the story, the boy or the woman? Sometimes all it takes for us to show God to others is to share what we have. It may be our Twinkies, It may be our root beer, and it may just be a great big smile. But whatever it is, it has the power to change people’s lives.