

May 6, 2007 John 13:31-35

There once was a small town with two catholic churches one was of German origin and the other of Polish. These churches were two blocks away and were served by the same priest. One day the bishop decided that it didn't make sense to have two churches in this small town. He felt it would be much more efficient and financially prudent to merge the two congregations together. Many people embraced the idea; however it did not sit well with all of the members.

One member was so upset that he took the piano that he had donated to "his" church and smashed it to pieces. What a profound statement that made.

I'm not catholic but I think it's fair to say that no one told him he had to like the merger but to react so violently. Just like members of a family don't need to like everything that goes on in a family but they need to find a way to get along. When Jesus says, Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

This man didn't like what was going on, so he smashes a piano. What will people on the outside of that congregation think? Does it appear that they are Disciples of Christ? Does it appear that they have love for one another? In a family the children will watch how the mother and father fight. I don't mean physical fighting; I mean they will watch how they deal with their disagreements.

The people outside the congregation will see how the people in the congregation deal with their disagreements. Everyone has disagreements. If you don't have disagreements you are not communicating because we all have our own opinions. Your opinions might be the opposite of mine, in which case you would be wrong.

Seriously, sometimes we have very strong opinions. How do we express them? How do we debate? Anyone can show the love when things are going good, when everyone agrees. How we deal with our disagreements is one way we show our love. I think a good question to ask yourself in times of disagreement is:

Where is the love?

³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

For some strange reason some Christians believe that if they hold an opinion that they believe is true in the eyes of God that gives them the right to rip out the heart of someone else. That they have the right to forget about the love Jesus is talking about. I guess if God can use evil intentions for good, the devil can use good intentions for evil.

Where is the love?

Where is the love?

Some one once told me that they had some problems in their church. He hadn't said anything yet but he thought he needed to and I quote, "Give my opinion, in Jesus' name." I imagine that Jesus would say, if you are going to give your opinion, I'd appreciate it if you used your own name.

I suggested to him that he speak the truth in love. I quoted Paul in 1Corinthians, *even if I have all faith as to move mountains but don't have love I am nothing*. He thought that I was saying that having love means just accepting everything and anything. That's not love at all.

If a child is holding a lit match and is endangering of burning themselves you don't just let them burn. You try to put the match out or get it out of their hand, but you don't cut their arm off.

I want to share a true story with you. I know it's true because I read it in a book and they don't print stories that aren't true. There was this guru that was meditating in the Himalayas. He opened his eyes and saw this Abbot, the head of a famous Monastery standing in front of him. What can I do for you? Well our Monastery used to draw many young men throughout the western world would flock to join our ranks and the church resounded with the chanting of the monks.

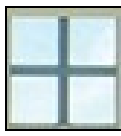
But now they don't come to refresh their spirit. Our number is few. We go about our chores with heavy hearts and there is no chanting in the church. I fear we will close.

What is your question for me asked the guru? Is it some sin have we committed that has led to our ruin. Yes said the guru. It is the sin of ignorance. One of your number is the messiah living among you in disguise but you have failed to recognize him. And with that he went back to his meditation.

The Abbot was filled with excitement. The Messiah living among us and I haven't noticed. Who could it be? Could it be Brother baker or Brother gardener or Brother treasurer? No he was filled with faults. They all had their faults. But he had said that the Messiah was in disguise. Maybe the faults were the disguise. He told them and they looked around at one another in disbelief. Who could it be? One thing was certain he was in disguise so they would never know. So they took to treating each other with love and respect, joyfully going about their daily chores.

Soon news of the love and joy they showed each other spread. Once again they flocked to the monastery and it was flourishing like never before and once again the beautiful chanting could be heard.

Penny Oleson told the beautiful story of how looking up at the cross on top of St. Ansgars she thought, "look God's window".



Like many churches these days, our worship attendance numbers have been slipping. Also before us is a capital campaign and we know the possibilities when people talk

about money especially in the church.

Jesus said, ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

When people look through God's window what will they see?