

May 15, 2022

John 13:31-35

“Don’t Hide Your Birthmark”

Sometimes you *learn about your own life and language* by studying someone else’s. For example, the little grammar I know came from studying something other than English. (With apologies to the English teachers who tried.) While studying German I learned the way we speak to one another in passing has grave consequences.

When we see someone, we know we ask, ***“How are you?”*** This seems like an innocent question. But in German, the question is “Wie gehts?” or ***“How goes it?”*** This is so much better. If we take the question, “How are you?” seriously, we *delve inside ourselves* and look for a *conclusion based on the sum of our circumstances*. ***Someone asking us how we are can put us into fits of existential angst.*** This has taught most people to *not really want to hear* our answer. I had one friend who changed the question to the desired answer and used to ask, ***“Things are good with you?”***

The problem with our question is that it ***equates circumstance with identity***. It assumes *we are no more than the sum of our circumstances*. German, on the other hand, asks about what is happening around us *without* equating circumstance with identity. This is much healthier, and something which happens in our text today.

We have discussed on Sunday morning how important context is when we are looking at a passage. Today’s text is ***sandwiched in between Judas leaving the last supper to betray Jesus and Jesus predicting Peter’s denial: everything appears to be unraveling.*** Let’s imagine Jesus is an American and we greet him just before today’s text and ask, *“How are you, Jesus?”* Jesus might answer, “I am discouraged. The amount of time I have put in to living with and teaching these disciples has worn me out! And what do I get? A traitor and a coward. I really expected something better after three years of work.” Three years!

Poetic license? Perhaps. But there is certainly truth in it. Jesus chose to focus on *“How goes it?”* He knew God was doing great and marvelous things through these difficult and discouraging circumstances. ***A cosmic battle was happening for God’s victory in our world and in our lives.*** And in the midst of it, Jesus takes

time to care for his disciples. ***Far from writing them off***, Jesus gives his disciples instruction ***because*** he is worried about them. He is worried ***because he is going away***. He has been the one *who explained* when they didn't understand. He was the one who *separated them* when they argued over who was the greatest. He *reigned them in* when they wanted to call down fire from heaven on their enemies. And now...he is going away.

As he prepares to leave, *Jesus doesn't ask them how they are*. He doesn't ask them to add up the plus and minus columns of life's experience and *decide if it is worth it*. He gives them *the key to living with each other and staying connected to him*. ***A new commandment I give to you – that you love one another***. Love one another. Love. *When life is hard. When we struggle to remember who we are as God's children. When we feel lost*. Our salvation is *not* to ask how we are doing but to ***remember God is faithful and loving one another will keep us connected*** and hold us close to Christ.

Love, it turns out, is our birthmark as the children of God. ***Love tells us who we are***. We make sense of life not by looking at the *sum of circumstance* but by living the *reality of love*.

There *is* great value in knowing ourselves – but that is different than evaluating life to decide if we want to go on as we answer the question, “How are you?” Indeed, no less than John Calvin said, “...*true and solid wisdom consists almost entirely of two parts: The knowledge of God and of ourselves.*”

We have been marked by love and sealed by the spirit. Who we are is more than the sum of events of any given day, year, or decade. And Jesus says to live out our calling as God's children by understanding that *the base* from which we move – *the trajectory* we follow, and the *basis of choice* is always love.

As we live this life filled with ups and downs – let's be those who ***let our birthmark shine***. In all the seasons of life: Happy or sad, hopeful, or worried, optimistic or Eeyore – our birthmark and birth right remains. Let us find our way living in ***the way of love***. Let's not be shy about our birthmark.