

Easter 5—C  
John 13:31-35  
Expect Love to Win

There's a skyscraper in downtown London that was finished just a couple of years ago and the skyscraper has a nickname. They nicknamed it the "walkie talkie," because the building looks like a giant walkie talkie. It was supposed to be a modern design that was supposed to add to the beauty of London's already beautiful skyline. But about a year after it was completed, this building won an award that no building designer really wants to win. It won an award called the Carbuncle Cup, which is given every year to the worst new building in the United Kingdom. And the reason it won the Carbuncle Cup was not because the building looks like a walkie talkie but rather because this building had a tendency to melt cars that were parked on the street near it. They put a reflective material around this entire building; intending that the building would look very radiant when the sun would shine on it. What they didn't anticipate though, was that during the two hours of the day when the sun was shining directly on one particular side of the building that was curved, the curve of the building along with the reflective material, would work together to act like a concave mirror that would reflect the rays of the sun and produce a light that is six times brighter than direct sunlight; shining a beam of heat onto the ground. It got up to 243 degrees Fahrenheit; hot enough to melt a car.

One of the first cars that it melted was a Jaguar XJ. Yeah, a car that can cost up to \$100,000. They expected that the building would be radiant; they did not expect it to cause destruction. They expected and hoped that the building would win some awards. They did not hope that the one award it would win would be so humiliating. Don't worry; they've since fixed the problem. If you go to London, you don't need to worry about it anymore. It doesn't destroy any cars anymore.

But the walkie talkie building is not the first thing in the history of the world for which people have had really high hopes only to end up with a lot of disappointment. In fact, the same thing can happen in pretty much all of our relationships. Sometimes I ask confirmation students to raise their hand if they personally know of a marriage in which the husband and the wife seem to genuinely enjoy spending time with each other. I've never had more than half the class raise their hands. In fact, usually it's far less than that.

On the day of their wedding, I think most couples are convinced that they would win an award for most loving relationship on the planet if there was such a thing. And yet, so many end up with the relationship equivalent of the Carbuncle Cup and often, a lot of pain and destruction along with it. And this doesn't just happen in marriage relationships. Can you think of any type of relationship in the world today in which love seems to be overwhelmingly winning in all the ways that we hoped that it would? I mean, do you see love overwhelmingly winning in business communities? Where companies are often so eager to step on the competition and rise above it that they will lie and cheat and steal in order to make that happen? Do you see love overwhelmingly winning in politics? Where politicians on the same side of the aisle often refer to each other as their "opponents?" Do you see love overwhelmingly consistently winning between adults and children?

There was a week recently on which the news had four different stories of four different adults—three in a school, one in a church—adults who were sexually abusing minors underneath their care. Do you see love overwhelmingly winning in the lives of our young men and young women? Do you know what the second leading cause of death is for 10 to 24 year olds? Suicide. Suicide. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for 10 to 24 year olds; many of whom, apparently, have given up hope that any parent, any sibling, any friend, any peer will ever love them ever again.

Do you think the average person has more relationships in their life in which they feel unconditionally loved or unequivocally afraid of how the other person is going to react if they make a mistake or if they say the wrong word or if they do the wrong thing? Or how they might react and what's going to happen if they discover some secret about me that I've been working really hard to keep hidden? Can you think of any type of relationship in the world today in which love is overwhelmingly winning? And if not—that's not easy to think—do you ever start to wonder if it can anymore?

That's the question that Jesus is going to help us answer today. Jesus knows how important love is in our lives and in our relationships. He knows the good that it can do when it's there and the horrible destruction it can do when it isn't. And whether or not you see it very often in your own lives, today Jesus is going to remind you why love that you show in your life is such an important thing, as well as what it looks like when we live as though we expect love to win.

From the gospel of John this morning, in John 13, where the Apostle John has these words for us starting in verse 31: "*After Judas left, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.'*" *'Dear children, I am going to be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. 'A new command I give you: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, so also you are to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'*" That's the word of God.

I'd like you to do something. I would like you to think of someone in your life who has let you down or who has betrayed your friendship or someone who has taken advantage of your kindness. Or someone who has rallied your enemies against you or someone whose actions or attitude has led to someone hurting. Is there anyone in your life that matches any of those descriptions?

There was for Jesus, too. Verse 31 started out by saying: "*After Judas left.*" And what Judas was going to do was to sell out his friend for 30 pieces of silver; an act of betrayal that would rally Jesus' enemies against him and lead to the horrible pain of Jesus' crucifixion. And yet, did you notice how Jesus responded to this when Judas left the room? "*Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him!*" It's almost as if he was breathing out a sigh of relief; like he was glad this was happening. And do you know why? Do you know what it means to glorify something? To glorify something, basically, is another way of saying you're shining the spotlight on something. And on this dark night that was about to get a whole lot darker because of what Judas was about to do, Jesus was going to shine the spotlight on something he believed was more powerful than even the most destructive sin. Jesus did not see the cause of his pain as an opponent to be crushed. He saw Judas' sin as an opportunity to shine the spotlight on God's love for us. Jesus was eager to move forward here because he fully expected his love to win and he wanted us to see what love looks like according to his definition.

I want you to think again of the person who popped into your brain just a few moments ago. Do you find yourself eager to show love to them when you think of them? Do you find it easy or difficult to be patient with them and kind? Easy or difficult to keep no record of wrongs? Easy or difficult to not get overwhelmingly angry when you think about what they've done? Sometimes it's difficult to love someone, which is why it's important to keep in mind three important truths about what love really is according to God's definition.

Firstly, love is not just a nice suggestion from Jesus. Love is the identifying mark of every single Christian. Jesus did not say, "All men will know that you are my disciples if you go out and become a missionary." Or, "All men will know that you are my disciples if you go and speak in tongues." "All men will know that you are my disciples if you give away all of your money," or, "If you go and convert all of your neighbors and friends." He, instead, identified an act that can be done by every single person, even the smallest children.

The second thing you need to know about love, 1 Corinthians 13:4 says: "*Love is patient.*" You know what it did not say? Love feels patient. Love, godly love, is more of an action and a decision than it is a feeling. You can be loving without feeling loving. And doing the dishes, even when you don't feel like it, is an incredibly loving thing to do. And guys, you can go out and get your girl flowers even when you don't feel very romantic. And guess what? That's going to come across as a very loving thing.

The third thing about love you need to know: "*Love never comes to an end.*" 1 Corinthians 13:8 says, "*Love never comes to an end,*" which means that if you are impatient with your kids or unkind to the guy who cuts you off in traffic, if you're envious of somebody else's body or money, if you boast so that you can get attention, if you're rude when your mom asks you to do something, if you are easily angered when someone disappoints you or if you never trust anyone until you feel you have enough proof, then whatever good you think you're accomplishing, what you're really doing is bringing love to an end. God's promise is that love

never ends, which means that showing the opposite of love always eventually will. “*Love never comes to an end.*” Love will never let you down. And yet, there’s a reason we’re often so afraid to show it.

There’s a woman named Stacy who worked at the Palm Beach Zoo in Florida. For three years, she was in charge of the tigers. She had a nickname; they called her the “Tiger Whisperer,” because she loved the tigers so much and she seemed to have a very special connection with them that allowed her to get very close to the tigers and work very closely with them. But one day, after three years of working with them, she was in the pen with the tigers when one of the tigers suddenly attacked her and mauled her and sent her to the hospital, where she died. It was a very sad event and afterwards, a lot of folks were saying that it was a sad event that never should have happened. Saying you just shouldn’t get that close to tigers. It’s possible it could go well; for three years it did. But by getting that close to a tiger, you’re also making yourself really vulnerable to getting hurt.

And many believe that love is much the same thing; that when you choose to show love to someone, it’s possible it could go well. But if love “*bears and believes all things,*” (1 Corinthians 13:7) for example, then love means getting close to that person and putting your defenses down, opening your arms, leaving exposed the most vulnerable parts of who you are. And especially if your heart has been mauled by someone in the past, we typically don’t like that vulnerable feeling. We much prefer to be safe; we much prefer to feel okay. We much prefer to feel like the relationship is going to reward us for the risk that we take in getting close to that person. I mean, isn’t that what you typically like to expect in your relationships?

I’m assuming we all have expectations in our relationships. And did you know that the expectations that we have in our relationships going in, actually have quite a bit to do with whether or not it’s difficult or easy to love someone as we’re in that relationship? For example, I want you to imagine that you are coming home from work after a long, hard, exhausting day and it’s only Tuesday, which means you have three more days left that you’ve got to go back and do it again. And you are just dreading the thought of going back but you’re looking forward to getting home so much and you are fully expecting that when you open up that door, dinner is going to be ready like it usually is, and the house is going to be clean, and your laundry—the clothes that you need for work tomorrow—is going to be washed and folded and put away in your drawer real nicely. And you expect that when you walk in the door the family’s going to come running to you and give you a big old hug and someone’s going to take your briefcase and show you to the recliner and invite you to sit down and then they’re going to give you a cold one and they’re going to give you the remote control for the TV. Aaah! Wouldn’t that be great? That happens to everybody every day, right?

Well, I want you to imagine that you’re coming home from work at the end of that same, long, difficult, hard day and it’s only Tuesday and you are dreading the thought of going back in the morning and you are fully expecting all of those things to happen. But when you walk in the door, you see that dinner is not ready. In fact, it hasn’t even been touched. And the house is a complete mess. And nobody’s come in to hug you. In fact, the kids are just running around and screaming in every direction and no one takes your briefcase from you so you just put it down on your own and you walk over to the recliner where you want to sit down but there are toys completely covering it. And then you look up at the TV that you want to watch and there’s a brand new crack right down the middle of it. And then you go to get a cold one because nobody’s giving you one but you find that all the cold ones are actually warm because no one put one in the fridge for you and then you look at the carpet and there’s a new poop mess that the dog left there that nobody cleaned up. I mean, how do you feel when what you hope for doesn’t happen? How easy is it to show love to the people who don’t meet your expectations? And those aren’t the only expectations that we typically have. I mean, we have expectations in almost all of our relationships.

What do you expect your neighbor to do when their leaves fall into your yard? What do you expect your children to do when you tell them to go and clean their room? If you’re married, what do you expect your spouse to do when you’re in the mood and it’s obvious that you’re in the mood? What do you expect your parents to do when they see you raise your children differently than they raised you? What do you expect your boss to do when you do your job really well and you know that he saw you? What do you expect in those things?

Have you ever asked yourself why you have the expectations that you do in your relationships? Or have you ever asked yourself how your expectations match up with the expectations Jesus had in his relationships?

How do you think that made Jesus feel, knowing that all of us were going to let him down by our sins? How do you think it felt knowing that if this relationship was going to survive, Jesus was going to have to carry the heaviest part of the burden? How do you think it felt when our selfishness led to a whip in his back and nails through his skin? How does it feel is not the question Jesus was asking because true godly love does not base its actions on how anyone else happens to make you feel at the moment. Truly godly, never-failing love simply is patient and kind, even to those who don't deserve it.

*"Love is not selfish"* (1 Corinthians 13:5). Even though Jesus knew showing love here would cause his own self to be mauled on a cross by those he was only guilty of loving. *"Love does not keep a record of wrongs,"* even if erasing that record could only happen by spilling out his precious blood all over them, just so you and I and everyone else who happens to see the cross of Christ could live with the truth that we have one friend who allows us to expect that you're going to be okay in the end. That your vulnerable life is going to be safe no matter what in all creation tries to get in the way. No matter what this hard, unloving world ever takes away.

Jesus told his disciples to *"love one another just as I have loved you."* Picture Jesus hanging on a cross, looking at you, and saying that to you: "I have loved you." He has. He does. He will. And he will never fail, especially when we put into practice the kind of love he commands us. You don't need to be afraid of love. In fact, this world could use a few more individuals who are pretty determined to shine the spotlight on it.

We know what love looks like but there are so many in this world who don't. Chances are you might eventually see somebody like Judas, who's so blinded by greed he can't even see the damage that he's doing. Or someone like Peter, who can't even see his own weakness because he's so blinded by his own self-confidence. You may already see in your life a wife who feels unnoticed or a husband who feels unappreciated, a child who feels overlooked by his parents. A parent who has been carrying around a lot of regret for time they didn't spend with their children. You might already see a friend who carries around a really guilty conscience or a neighbor who feels alone and afraid that everyone's forgotten about them.

Chances are you already know someone who's vulnerable and who needs to see exactly what Jesus has equipped you to give them: A love that will never fail and someone who fully expects it to win. Amen.