

John 13:31-35 is a familiar passage to many of us. In Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus is asked a question about which is the greatest commandment, and Jesus replies with both the Shema from Deuteronomy 6:4 (Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind), and adds a second: “and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

But in John’s Gospel, the Shema isn’t there. Instead, Jesus says that he is giving them a new commandment. This takes place just after he has warned them that he will be betrayed, just after we are informed that Judas is the one who will betray him—Jesus tells them they must love one another. If we have love for one another, everyone will know that we are Jesus’ disciples. Even the ones who betray us and hurt us, we are called to love. Even the ones who deny us (the passage goes on to foretell Peter’s denial). We are called to love.

John 13:31-35

When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 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.’ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. 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.”

Readings

COCU 35C Easter 5C

Acts 11:1-18

Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, saying, “Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?” Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’ But I replied, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ But a second time the voice answered from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane.’ This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.’ And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, “Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.”

Psalm 148 is a song of praise for God's work in creation, and calls upon creation to respond in praise. We are reminded that the relationship of God with creation is not just us (humanity) and God, but between us, God, and creation. We are called to join with creation in praising God, not ignoring or defiling creation. This psalm reminds us that God is the one who has created all, and that all of creation participates in the worship and celebration of God.

Psalm 148 (CEV)

Shout praises to the LORD!

Shout the LORD's praises in the highest heavens.

All of you angels, and all who serve God above, come and offer praise. Sun and moon, and all of you bright stars, come and offer praise. Highest heavens, and the water above the highest heavens,^[a] come and offer praise.

Let all things praise the name of the LORD, because they were created at God's command.

God made them to last forever, and nothing can change what God has done.^[b] All creatures on earth, you obey God's commands, so come praise the LORD! Sea monsters and the deep sea, fire and hail, snow and frost, and every stormy wind, come praise the LORD!

All mountains and hills, fruit trees and cedars, every wild and tame animal, all reptiles and birds, come praise the LORD!

Every king and every ruler, all nations on earth, every man and every woman, young people and old, come praise the LORD!

All creation, come praise the name of the LORD.

Praise God's name alone.

The glory of God is greater than heaven and earth. Like a bull with mighty horns, the LORD protects God's faithful people, because they belong to God.

Shout praises to the LORD!

Revelation 21:1-6 tells of the new heaven and new earth—a passage of hope and restoration, where God's home is among all living beings. We usually think of heaven as somewhere else, but Revelation shows us that God's intention is for heaven to be among us. God's intention is for God's home to be among us. The walls of separation of this life from the next, of earth and heaven, of life and death—will be gone. God's intention is for us to dwell together. God's intention for all of us is to dwell in creation together (Genesis). Reflecting back upon Psalm 148, this is part of the design of creation from the beginning—that we would be in relationship with God and with each other. We are called not only to reconcile with each other and with God, but we need to reconcile with creation. We have misunderstood our role of having dominion and subduing the earth—we have done so for our own use, not for God's. Revelation speaks that the ways of this world, the separations of earth and heaven, of humanity and God, of our ways versus God's intentions, will be gone. God's intention will come to fruition, and the boundaries will pass away. We live for this vision.

Revelation 21:1-6

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God will be with them; God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.