

Sermon Notes – May 18, 2025
The Holy Gospel of St. John 13: 31-35
Peace Lutheran Church
“Through the Lens of Love”

Today's reading makes this clear: God does new things, but in fulfillment of long held hopes. The driving force behind this activity is love - for one another, outsiders and all who know the pain of death.

The reading from Acts concludes a larger story of great significance to the narrative (10: 1-11: 18). For faithful Jews at this time, sharing space and meals with the “uncircumcised” (Gentiles) was an offense to conventional piety far more serious than most modern Westerners understand (compare Gal. 2: 11-14). Peter concludes his testimony of events with a pointed question: “If then God gave them the same gift [of the Holy Spirit] that [God] gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God? “(Acts 11: 17). The language of “hindering” God reflects a recurring concern in Acts (5: 39, 8: 36; 10: 47; 15: 10, 28: 30-31), suggesting its relevance for church communities in Luke's day - and ours. Peter's spoken testimony provokes silence, persuasion, and praise - attesting to the enduring significance of bearing personal witness to what God has done.

The second reading is perhaps the most beautiful passage in Revelation. Contrary to popular assumptions, this climactic vision of eternal life with God takes place not in heaven but on a renewed earth. This renewal involves the passing away of the “first” heaven and earth, as emphasized by the words, “See, I am making all things new” (21: 5). The absence of tears, death, mourning, crying, and pain, as well as the sea (associated with the abyss), signifies freedom from all threats and harm. The vision's language draws directly from Isaiah (25: 8; 43: 19; 65: 17), makes it a fulfillment of hopes long held. To this day, the picturesque words of this passage make it often read at funerals to comfort those grieving the pain of death.

Today's gospel reading takes place as Jesus' hour of “glory” begins, which in the fourth gospel refers to His cross, resurrection and ascension. As Judas departs, these events are set in motion. Aware of His impending death, Jesus issues “a new commandment,” that His followers “love one another” as He has loved them (John 13: 34). The language is more internally focused than that of loving the neighbor (Mark 12: 28-34) or enemy (Matt 43-48; Luke 6: 27-36), but for a community experiencing dislocation and trauma, as John's community may have, this focus may have been more contextually appropriate. Further, since Jesus is the model for this love, it automatically includes the world. Such love

will speak more loudly than words about who this community is and to whom it belongs.

In a world marred by divisions, violence and death, Jesus calls us to love one another in a way that bears witness to how we are forever loved by God in Christ!