

EASTER 5

Year C

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Another Impossible Commandment

They sat around the table, not yet knowing it was the last time. The bread was still warm, the air still full of ordinary things, but something in the room had shifted. The water had barely dried from their feet when he spoke—*“Love one another. As I have loved you.”*

Love that doesn’t draw lines around who gets to belong. Love that kneels even when the heart is breaking. They didn’t know yet what he meant—not really. But he did. He had already begun. And now we have heard it, too. The only mark of those who follow him will not be well-polished theological arguments, perfectly executed potlucks, or our ability to sing “Come, Thou Fount” by heart.

On this fifth Sunday of Easter, still rising from death and dust and disbelief, we are marked not by certainty or success or piety, but by this: how we love, and who we’re willing to become in the process.

Acts 11:1-18

11 Now the apostles and the brothers and sisters who were in Judea heard that the gentiles had also accepted the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, ³ saying, “Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?” ⁴ Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, ⁵ “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. ⁶ As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. ⁷ I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’ ⁸ But I replied, ‘By no means, Lord, for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ ⁹ But a second time the voice answered from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane.’ ¹⁰ This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. ¹¹ At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. ¹² 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. ¹³ 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; ¹⁴ he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.’ ¹⁵ And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the

beginning. ¹⁶ 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.’ ¹⁷ 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?” ¹⁸ 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.”

Commentary from Tina Francis

When God Breaks the Rules

Poor Peter. Poor, rule-following, well-intentioned, sincere Peter, who thought he had this faith thing nailed down. Because what is religion, if not a clearly labeled seating chart? The clean over here, the unclean over there, no need to mix.

And then the dream comes. A sky cracked open and down floats a picnic basket—wild, crawling, hooved, unholy things tumbling out. A feast Peter never asked for. A voice he can't ignore: "Eat."

Peter, bless him, pushes back. Because he knows the rules. He's built his life on the rules. But apparently, God has moved past them. "What God has made clean, you must not call profane."

And just like that, Peter's entire theological framework is toast. His boundaries blur. And to drive the point home, the Spirit descends—right there, on the very people he was told to avoid. No conversion form. No doctrinal checkbox. No religious SAT score required.

Peter, stunned, horrified, a little in awe, asks: "Who was I that I could hinder God?"

And isn't that the question? Because God is always bigger. Always wilder. Always more unsettlingly inclusive than we're ready for.

Discussion Questions

When has God's grace been frustratingly inclusive?

Where in your life are you keeping God small, contained, and respectable?

Psalm 148

- ¹ Hallelujah! Praise the Lord from the heavens; *
praise him in the heights.
- ² Praise him, all you angels of his; *
praise him, all his host.
- ³ Praise him, sun and moon; *
praise him, all you shining stars.
- ⁴ Praise him, heaven of heavens, *
and you waters above the heavens.
- ⁵ Let them praise the Name of the Lord; *
for he commanded, and they were created.
- ⁶ He made them stand fast for ever and ever; *
he gave them a law which shall not pass away.
- ⁷ Praise the Lord from the earth, *
you sea-monsters and all deeps;
- ⁸ Fire and hail, snow and fog, *
tempestuous wind, doing his will;
- ⁹ Mountains and all hills, *
fruit trees and all cedars;
- ¹⁰ Wild beasts and all cattle, *
creeping things and winged birds;
- ¹¹ Kings of the earth and all peoples, *
princes and all rulers of the world;
- ¹² Young men and maidens, *
old and young together.
- ¹³ Let them praise the Name of the Lord, *
for his Name only is exalted, his splendor is
over earth and heaven.
- ¹⁴ He has raised up strength for his people
and praise for all his loyal servants, *
the children of Israel, a people who are near
him. Hallelujah!

Commentary from Tina Francis

Everything Everywhere All at Once

This psalm is an open invitation—for everything, everywhere, all at once—to praise God. Mountains? Of course. Storms? Absolutely. Sea monsters? Sure, why not?

It's an apocalyptic karaoke night—every creature gets a verse. Not just the choir, not just the ones who read sheet music and land every note with confidence. But the algae, the street pigeons, the beetles rolling tiny balls of dung with fierce determination. And yes, even the spider—a tiny mystic—spinning her fragile masterpiece, waiting for the light to hit the prayer rug just so.

God calls to the alley cats, the old women on their porches watching the world shuffle by, and the kids with sticky hands, lifting them to the sky for no reason except the sky is there and so are they.

Because apparently, God is not interested in curated praise. No polished performance required. No auditions or tryouts. Just the whole, holy, loud, off-key, unfiltered chorus of creation, singing anyway.

Which means you, too. You, with your big feelings and your deep worries. You, the radiant and the ragged. You, trying your best, or maybe not trying at all today. Even when you don't feel like much of a hymn, you're already part of the song.

You are the song.

Discussion Questions

If God is inviting everything to sing, whose voices have you learned to tune out?

What would it look like to let your mess join the melody?

Revelation 21:1-6

21 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. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them and be
their God;
⁴ he 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.”

⁵ 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.” ⁶ 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.

Commentary from Tina Francis

One Wedding, Zero Funerals

Rome believed itself eternal. As if the Pax Romana—the peace of conquest—wasn’t a fragile veil stretched over the thunder of marching feet. As if fear could impersonate peace forever. As if empire were the sun and the rest of us mere shadows, caught in its orbit, circling and circling, unable to break free.

But John sees something else entirely—not a war, not a divine smackdown, not a reckoning. A wedding—the long-awaited embrace of heaven and earth. The dissolving of all distance between the Divine and the dust. And like every sacred union, it brings with it a home—built not of force but of longing and love. A city that does not conquer but welcomes, descending like breath, like blessing, like the dream we forgot we were allowed to want.

The walls are made of welcome, the streets of mercy, the air thick with the scent of something new and ancient all at once.

And at last, there is rest. The kind you didn’t know you needed, the kind that feels like coming in from the cold. The kind that comes when you realize you don’t have to fight anymore, because love has already won.

Rome? Temporary. Caesar? A footnote. Empire? A fading echo, swallowed by the sound of love calling us home.

Discussion Questions

Where in your life have you accepted a "Pax Romana"—a false peace that masks control or fear?

If empire is fading, why does it still echo in you?
What would it cost to stop listening?

John 13:31-35

³¹When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³²If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³Little 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.’ 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.”

Commentary from Tina Francis

The Revolution Will Not Be Televised

The revolution will not be televised. It will be powered by a towel and a basin, with bread broken in trembling hands, with love that kneels instead of conquers.

Jesus waits until Judas has left. The betrayal is in motion. The cross is hours away. As the door closes, the room holds its breath.

Outside, Rome is still Rome. The empire stretches from Spain to Syria, with legions enforcing the will of men who call themselves gods. But inside, Jesus turns to the ones who remain—men who, by morning, will abandon him. He knows them. The softness of their hands. The way their eyes widen when the world turns cruel. Still, he loves them.

"Love one another. As I have loved you."

A commandment terrifying in its tenderness. Given by the one whose hands shaped the cosmos—and scrubbed the dirt from his betrayer's toes. A love so absurd, so unflinching, that even Judas, silver in hand, left with love-soaked feet.

If Judas was included, who are we to decide who isn't? This love—impossible, unrelenting—is how they would be known.

Two thousand years later, Rome has crumbled. The gods of conquest are forgotten. Yet this

love—this ridiculous, relentless mercy—still rises from the ground like something green and stubborn and alive.

The revolution has already begun.

Discussion Questions

Judas, even in betrayal, left with love-soaked feet. Who do you struggle to kneel before, to welcome, to love without condition? What would it take to let Christ's love undo that boundary in you?

What would change if you lived like the revolution had already begun?