

**Do You Get It Now?**  
(John 13:31-35)

It was as though she had been plucked from the comfort of her 21<sup>st</sup> century home and transported to another place and time. She found herself in the middle of a crowded courtyard. It was dry, dusty and hot. The place was ancient and so were people there. There were beggars and rich men, prostitutes and pastors, lawyers and thieves. The oppressed stood shoulder to shoulder with their oppressors. All manner of humanity seemed to be represented.

She floated through the crowd unnoticed, like she was invisible. As she approached the center of the mass she saw two men dressed in plain robes. Covered in dust, it looked as if they had just arrived from a long journey. They were talking loudly and holding a large silver bowl with two handles on either side.

The highly polished bowl gleamed in the hot sun, reflecting many intricate designs. She thought it was the most beautiful bowl she had ever seen. So beautiful in fact, it looked quite out of place in the dusty ancient courtyard. As she came closer she could hear what the two men were saying. "What will you give to your Lord? What do you have to offer to your Lord today?"

As they spoke, the two men held out the glittering bowl for the people to make their offerings. And the people came to place their gifts in the bowl. They brought gold and silver, jewelry and expensive perfumes. Others brought food – birds, lamb, and bread.

There were so many gifts offered up it seemed like the bowl would not be large enough to receive all that these people had to offer. But the bowl seemed to be bottomless, the more that went in, the more room there was for the people's gifts.

Then she saw an old man at the edge of the crowd. He was dirty and dressed in a thread-bare robe. She watched as the creaky old man approached the beautiful bowl. He reached into the folds of his worn out robe and took out a tattered piece of papyrus. With great care, he placed the paper in the bowl.

The people began to taunt the old man. "What is this worthless piece of paper you have offered up to our Lord?" Meanwhile, at the back of the chanting crowd a strange hooded figure had been watching. The hooded figure began to make his way forward. As he moved the crowd parted to allow him to pass. The crowd was subdued in a tense silence by this strange figure.

She watched now with anticipation as the hooded figure reached into the silver bowl and removed the tattered papyrus left by the old man. Suddenly, the hood fell away to reveal a ruggedly handsome face with soft eyes that were filling with tears.

Jesus read from the papyrus that was the old man's offering. "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. And equally important, love your neighbor as yourself. The entire law

and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commands.”

Jesus put the piece of papyrus back into the silver bowl and turned to speak to the crowd. She hung on his soothing voice, careful not to miss a single word. And this is what Jesus said: “I have tried so many times to explain it to you all and finally, some one – this old man – gets it! This is the greatest gift you can give me.” And then she awoke. Please pray with me.

God of grace and love, open our hearts and minds to the scripture read and your word proclaimed. Make my words your words. Lead us to a clearer understanding of your love for us and your expectations for us – that we love you, as well as those many you place in our paths as we journey through this life of discipleship. In Christ we pray. Amen.

If that story sounds like a dream, it's because it is. Not my dream, but the dream of one of our church family. I'm sure I was not able to do justice with it, as it was originally told to me, but it is a compelling example of one way scripture intersects our lives. God has spoken through dreams since humans became capable of rational thought.

The gospel lesson this morning connects with the dream story. In the dream Jesus shows his frustration for what the biblical text so painfully illustrates. The people Jesus ministered to didn't get it. The disciples didn't get it. He had to give them a “new” command. And still they didn't get it. Jesus speaks to us today out of the biblical text and this dream to ask the question of us, “Do we get it?”

When the Pharisees questioned Jesus about which commandment was the greatest, he named two. The first is what the Jews call the *Shema* – “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” The *Shema* is faithfully recited by Jewish congregations whenever they gather to worship. It is also printed on a small scroll inserted in the *mezuzah* – that small box fixed to the door frame in the entryway of most Jewish homes. The second commandment, Jesus explained to the Pharisees, is a “new” command. “Love one another in exactly the same way that you have been loved by God.”

Jesus kept it simple by reducing all the Mosaic Laws into two simple requirements. The first defines our relationship with God. The second defines our relationship with God's children. What is it that we don't get? The law seems clear – love God and others as God has loved us.

This is the essence of the gospel message. As Christians we often talk about the gospel message. We talk about being disciples of Jesus Christ and spreading the gospel message. We preach the gospel message. We are supposed to be disciples of Jesus Christ by witnessing to and living out the gospel message. But do we truly know what the message of the gospel really is? It goes to the very heart of our faith.

The gospel message is embodied in three words. Okay, it's not three words. Actually, it's one word and two numbers. You all know them well, perhaps too well. Would anyone like to venture an answer? Does *John 3:16* ring a bell.

“This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one

and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life.”

This is not the essence of the gospel message, it *is* the gospel message. In light of this which we believe to be the basic truth for our lives, what do we not get about these two simple requirements – to love God and the many others God places in our path and do it in the same way God has loved us. In order to *get it* we need to understand what it means to love as God has loved us. *John 3:16* holds the key to the test of how God has loved us.

If we literally interpret the two commands in the dream story and apply the test of God’s love in *John 3:16*, we would conclude that God is actually asking us to give up our lives – to die just as Jesus died. And actually, that is precisely what God asks of us – to die for the sake of the gospel message.

What does it mean to die for the sake of the gospel message? The answer needs to come from a theological perspective rather than our physical understanding of bodily death. God does not ask that we die in the literal or physical sense. What God asks is that we die to our sin.

God expects that we understand and accept that a great price has been paid in the actions of Christ Jesus. The power of God’s love for us is the source of our salvation – eternal life. It’s called *self-emptying love*. It’s what Jesus did on the cross. God in Jesus Christ completely abandoned the self, emptying completely, giving up everything for the sake of his message – the gospel message – his love for us.

What don’t we get about loving in the way God has loved us? What don’t

we get about dieing to our sin? What don’t we get about loving each other? What don’t we get about being disciples of Jesus Christ. Some of you may remember that old adage: “Charity begins at home.” We can’t get these basic tenants of our faith unless we first love ourselves. We can’t love each other until we can love ourselves. And we can’t love ourselves until we die to our sin. Once we understand this, then and only then will we get it the way the old man did in the dream story. So the real question we need to answer is: “Do we get it now”?