

John 13:31-35
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“Love that Gives Life”

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Professor Isaac Asimov died in 1972, an absolute master of Science Fiction, he wrote a book titled, The Naked Sun. In this work he weaves a story about a future planet called ‘Solaria.’

On Solaria each person lives in absolute luxury but also in extreme isolation. The isolation is both physical and emotional. Any direct contact is forbidden. Communication is through viewing an image on a video screen. For the Solarians it is vulgar and indecent to experience any form of human caring or closeness. The most impure of all words is the four letter word, “love.” When I read about this book, and this place called Solaria, it almost broke my heart.

This weekend I had the tremendous privilege to attend the annual “Wall of Honor” ceremony at Craig High School in Janesville, WI. We were there because my wife’s Uncle Kermit was one of the 2016 honorees joining the wall of honor. There were some prestigious names on the wall already, Russ Feingold, Paul Ryan, state senator Tim Cullen, and nationally known writer Mary Duffy McBride just to name a few.

We were there to support Ann’s uncle Kermit who has dedicated his life to serving his country and improving the lives of its citizens. He was very active during his HS years at Craig, including being part of a state championship Debate team and the National Honor Society. During his service in the military he received 5 bronze stars for acts of courage and selflessness under fire, but the story he told from his Vietnam years was about a time he was under fire, running to the helicopter for safety and dropped his eyeglasses, he was feeling around on the ground for them when another serviceman grabbed him by the belt and pulled him into the helicopter just in time. For nearly 20 years Uncle Kermit has volunteered at a marine mammal rescue center at the San Francisco Wharf, and 10 years ago began organizing and sending care packages to troops deployed overseas.

The main story was about a typical day Kermit was walking into his neighborhood bakery and intervened to stop a man who was brutally attacking a 15 year old girl with a knife. He and she were both stabbed, but have both survived without major impairments. This earned him the Carnegie metal for Heroism, a San Francisco police commission commendation, and the John A Britton Gold metal for Courage. This made him a hero in the minds of many people.

But following a wonderful introduction by one of Craig HS’s seniors, Kermit was allowed to speak, and spent most of his 10 minutes trying to inspire the young people and reminding them that all of us can be Hero’s.

Here at the end of Jesus’ life we hear his words of wisdom. We understand more deeply how he sees his death serving as an offering life for others. In the other gospels this is where Jesus shares the “last supper” with his disciples, his way of saying my life, my body, and therefore my love lives on in the bodies of my disciples. – That’s Resurrection.

In this story we see Jesus Glorified, but not in the way we might expect. Here Glory is not something that comes from fame, money, success, status, or power; it is something that springs from his selfless love.

On this weekend that we celebrate "Earth Day" Uncle Kermit's story reminds us how the call to love others needs to be expanded. Often our faith has been limited, selective, and centered in one living species, humans. But Earth day reminds us of all the "little ears" that are listening to us, and watching us and in their own way giving thanks to God. The trees and grass outside, the bees buzzing around the sanctuary, the plants in the gathering space, the deer and raccoons wondering by our open windows in the parking lot. God's revelation and salvation is not just for humans, not just for "Church people." God loves sharks, and whales, hawks and wild turkey, house pets, and leaves, flowers and streams, as well as humankind.

These are powerful words Jesus leaves us with. He could have said "Come and die with me," or "keep the faith after I'm gone," or "go and preach and teach in all the world." Instead he leaves us with a most simple yet challenging Word, "love one another." It's another way of saying the whole world will know us not by our sermons or sacraments or festivals, or buildings, or our religious symbols... but by the love we share and the love we receive. That is how foundational it is.

We do love, regularly, and we do fail, regularly and church is a place we can give thanks for the former, and pray about the latter. Jesus did not go to the cross to make God loving, or to satisfy God's judgement, or to take our punishment on himself. He went to the cross to show us in word and action that God is love and that we, as God's children, are deeply and fully loved. So while we succeed and we fail to love others, Jesus loves us more than we can possibly imagine, which sort of sets us free, again, to love one another.

April 5th, 2014 a story ran about a boy, Chen Xiaotian. His family was facing more than its share of tragedy. Five year old Chen's diagnosis with brain cancer came just months away from his mother learning she had uremia, which sometimes develops in people with serious Kidney disease. After two years, both conditions worsened. Chen, age 7, knowing he would die, was aware his kidney might save his mother. He pleaded with her to let him save her life. Two hours after Chen's death, his mother received her son's kidney. Two other persons benefited from Chen's gift of life. His other kidney was transplanted to a 21 year old woman, and a 26 year old man received the boy's liver.

Jesus' dying wish was for his disciples to share a kind of love filled with the power to give life, Resurrection love, when he says, "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."

Amen