

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³² If God has been glorified in him, ^[a] God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³ 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.' ³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:31-35 NRSV

Jesus' commandment on the last night of his life tells the disciples how to let people know that they belong to him. It was a command that they fulfilled after the day of Pentecost. One of the greatest witnesses of the early church to outsiders was the love that they had for one another. One might also say it contributed to the growth of the church in the late Roman Empire.

However the great tragedy of the church, as many years went by, was the lack of that love for one another becoming a black mark on Christianity that exists to this very day.

Even on a smaller scale, individual churches have fights and disagreements break out that leave a lot of hurt. In one particular church I served the former pastor left a lot of angry people, and it took time to try to bring people back together again.

So then how can we bear witness to this command of our Lord? First I believe we all must embrace Luther's saying that we are "sinners in the best life," and work through situations seeking confession and forgiveness from God and to one another. This does not sound easy but it does bear good fruit.

There is a story of a Christian Community in Darmstadt Germany that formed with a sisterhood after World War II. A chapel was to be built of stones, and the sisters were doing the work. They had a large cart that ran on a set of tracks up the hill to where the chapel was to be built. Obviously the cart was very heavy and it took a few sisters to push it up. One day however, on several occasions when they were pushing the cart up to the site of the chapel, the cart tipped over on its side. The Mother Superior decided to stop the work and take the sisters aside to talk to them.

When she talked with them she discovered that several of them had harsh judging thoughts towards a couple of the others who were helping. They then confessed their sin to each other and to God asking for God's forgiveness. Once they did, the work went on seamlessly and the cart did not fall over or jump the track again.

The world can be a very harsh place in many ways. I have seen family situations of hurt that can destroy people lives.

May we learn by God's grace how to bear witness to Jesus' words "Love one another as I have loved you...by this all will know you are my disciples if you have love for one another"

Pr. John Van Haneghan