

Rev. Mike Cole
Providence Presbyterian Church
Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 10, 2026
Psalm 66:8-20; John 14:15-21

"Table Talk"

I'm curious – how many of us regularly have a meal at home around a table? When I was a kid my family always ate dinner at our kitchen table. We didn't have a dining room in our house, so all our meals were at the kitchen table. We shared stories of our day, observations about life in general and dealt with problems or issues facing us individually and as a family.

The kitchen table was where I learned that my oldest sister was getting married. It's also where I learned that my father had been fired from his job. It's where my mother announced that she was going back to work. It's where I told my family that I had been disciplined by the principal (several times). Table talk wasn't all about major things in our lives; we laughed and joked and teased each other, too but lots of important conversations happened at the table.

It's somewhat like what John reported in chapter 14 when Jesus sat at a table with his disciples for the last time and shared vital teaching with his followers. Today's scripture from John takes place in the upper room where the disciples had gathered for the last supper. It is there that Jesus washed the disciples' feet and predicted his imminent death. It is through the upper room door that Judas left to do his despicable deed of betrayal. No sooner did the door close behind Judas than Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified and God has been glorified in him."

What an odd thing to say, they probably thought. In hindsight it may have seemed even more odd to claim that he was glorified by Judas' betrayal. Obviously, God's idea of glory is totally different from ours. God's idea of glory is fleshed out upon the cross. As hideous as that death is, it makes His victory on Easter that much more glorious. God was willing to endure the pain, shame and humiliation in order to reveal His true nature. God willingly suffered and died so that we might have new life. Jesus showed us that the way to glory is through sacrifice. In a sense, mothers have known that for eons

Show Video of "My mother always said..."

The glory of motherhood isn't accompanied by festivals, bright lights and awards. The glory of motherhood comes with chauffeuring kids to baseball games and ballet lessons, cooking meals that sometimes get cold before anyone sits down to eat, cleaning wounds and peeling band aids. To be honest, it's not exactly what a woman thinks of when she is first told that she is to be a mother. It's not exactly her idea of the glory of motherhood.

I'm reminded of the story of a little girl who was about to speak her lines in an old-fashioned children's pageant in church. When she got in front of the crowd, the sight of hundreds of curious eyes focused upon her threw her into a panic. Every line that she had rehearsed so carefully faded from her mind as she stood frozen in her tracks, unable to utter a single syllable. In the front pew, her mortified mother frantically moved her lips to form silent words and pleaded with her eyes, all to no avail. Finally, in desperation, the mother whispered her daughter's opening line: "I am the light of the world." Instantly the child's face relaxed, a smile appeared where there had been clouds of concern before, and, with supreme confidence, she belted out her first line: "My mother is the light of the world."

That may well be true for many but not all of us. My mother was a good woman who loved me without hesitation. In that regard, I'm fortunate because I realize that not everyone has had such a loving maternal relationship. Some of us have more of a maternal relationship with someone who did not give birth to us but who nevertheless cared for us as we imagine a mother would.

The love demonstrated by our biological or surrogate mother formed our earliest perceptions of what love is. It became, for us, our reference point for love - the yardstick against which other kinds of love were measured. It is also one thing more - it is nothing when compared to the love of God. I don't intend to be disrespectful to anyone's mother, but the truth of the matter is that no matter how ideal a mother's love is, it cannot hold a candle to the powerful love God has for us.

In this intimate setting around a table, Jesus began to speak of his imminent death. "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.'" Something about that statement didn't quite sit right with the disciples. What bothered them was the link between themselves and the Jews. Even though most of the disciples were Jews, they held themselves apart from those who represented the status quo. In their minds, they were very different from "them." But Jesus made it very clear that there is no "us" and "them," there is only "us" and "him."

None of them, and consequently, none of us have any reason to boast of our position in the kingdom of God. Jesus was not only the right person for the job of saving humanity, he was the only one for the job. He accomplished in his death what no one else could have accomplished in life - the balancing of the scales for humanity.

The final topic of Jesus' table talk was a new commandment: "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."

Jesus was not speaking of love in the abstract, some esoteric notion of deep feeling. When Jesus speaks of love he is talking about love in the concrete – love in action. When people who have just performed some heroic, life-endangering deed in order to save another are asked how they "felt" about what they were doing while they were doing it, the reply is usually "nothing." Here's a stranger who helped pull three children out of a burning house: "I didn't even think about it. It was happening so fast, and I knew we just had to get them out of there." Here's a mother who lifts a tree off her son's leg: "I didn't even feel how heavy it was - until I put it down."

When love and compassion for another take over completely, it is expressed through actions not feelings. You cannot gradually and cautiously feel your way toward a loving action. Genuine love always leaps before it looks. Jesus' new commandment to his disciples was precisely this: Show your love. Love one another. By your love they will know more about you than by anything you could say. Love each other as I have loved you.

Jesus didn't love us simply by feeling loving toward us. Jesus lived a life that embodied love. He healed the sick. He fed the hungry. He comforted the confused. He taught the ignorant. He hugged little children.

Jesus' love was so great that he suffered torture, went to the cross, and died to demonstrate his action-packed love. The love Jesus wants his disciples to enter into, not just to feel, is action-packed. And love in action is sometimes embodied by the simplest of compassionate responses.

It is significant that Jesus chose to teach the disciples about love when they gathered for a meal around a table. Every month, we also gather around a table to learn, have important discussions and be fed. It is at this table that we experience Jesus' love in action for us. It is here that we acknowledge and accept Jesus' ultimate sacrifice. It is here that we encounter love more powerful than death itself.

Love is the subject of the most important "table talk" we'll ever experience. It is also supposed to be the object of our lives.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Charge: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen