

# FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

## Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

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### I Hate and I Love

#### John 12:20-33

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast.<sup>21</sup> They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus."<sup>22</sup> Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.<sup>23</sup> Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."<sup>24</sup> I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.<sup>25</sup> The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.<sup>26</sup> Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.<sup>27</sup> "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.<sup>28</sup> Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."<sup>29</sup> The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.<sup>30</sup> Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine."<sup>31</sup> Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.<sup>32</sup> But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."<sup>33</sup> He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

*Odi et amo.* These three Latin words begin a famous couplet by the Roman poet Catullus. *Odi et amo*: I hate and I love. In the poem, Catullus describes the emotional turmoil he is suffering in his relationship with his mistress. These words describe the two most basic of human emotions: love and hate. In a way, you can boil down all of life to those two emotions. What or whom do you love? What or whom do you hate? These are the questions that we are faced with this morning as we look at the words Jesus spoke to his disciples, while in the temple courts in Jerusalem.

Jesus tells us very clearly what it is we *should* love and what it is we *should* hate. He says, "*The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*" Jesus calls all his disciples, and that includes us, to follow him and hate their lives. What does he mean by this? Does Jesus want us to hate everything about ourselves and all those around us? Certainly not! What Jesus wants us to hate are those things which our sinful nature and the sinful world around us prizes. Jesus words are call to abandon our self-centeredness and think of only what God wants. Jesus wants us to hate everything that leads us to indulge our sinful flesh and tries to pull us away from God.

If you think about it, your life is a really just a series of choices: morning to night, day after day. Every one of those choices you make is a reflection of what is most important to you at that time. It shows what or whom it is that you truly love. If you think of your life and the choices you make day after day, do those choices show that you hate this corrupt and sinful world or does it sometimes look as though you love it?

Hating this life can be a very difficult thing. There is so much pressure to do just the opposite. We get pressure from those around us. We get pressure from our own sinful nature, which says, “If it makes you happy, it must be ok. Who cares what God says?” One of the greatest ways we are tempted to love this world is by the culture of materialism we find all around us. Our society is infatuated with owning the latest and greatest toys—whether they are electronic, motorized or sided and painted. One quick way to check whether you love or hate this life is to check where the majority of your resources are allocated—your time, your effort, and your money. Is most of it spent on God-pleasing activities and gospel-focused work or is most of it spent on satisfying your desire to please old #1? I think when it comes to this world and its ways, most of us would confess that we have conflicting emotions, at best. We’d have to say along with the poet Catullus: I hate *and* I love.

Thankfully, Jesus was never so conflicted. He loved his Father completely and hated this sinful world with all its pleasures. This fact is very clear in the Gospel reading we have today. The situation that leads us to this discovery is a request from some God-fearing Greeks who were in Jerusalem for the Passover feast. These Greeks were proselytes or converts to Judaism. They followed the religion of the Jews, but they did not share their ethnic background. These Greeks had a desire while they were in Jerusalem: they wanted an audience with Jesus. For some reason, they were not able to approach Jesus on their own, so they sought out one of his disciples, Philip. Perhaps these Greeks were from the same hometown as Philip and already knew him. They may have just been attracted to the fact that he had a Greek name. After hearing their request, Philip sought his fellow disciple Andrew and they both went to Jesus.

Jesus answers this request by turning to a more important subject. These Greeks served as a sign to him of the work that he had come to this earth to accomplish. He had come to pay the price for the sins of the world—both Jews and Greeks. The time was very near at hand for that payment to take place. The cross was only days away and, clearly, it was foremost in Jesus’ mind. And so he turned the subject to the cross and he told those disciples: “*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds*” Jesus knew that in order for him to fulfill his mission of salvation, he would have to die. If he were someone who loved this world and its pleasures, that would be a horrifying thought. Death would bring that all to an end and he would want to avoid that at all costs. But instead of trying to put off death, Jesus welcomed his death because he knew that it would be his perfect act of love for this sinful world. That is why he said: “*Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify your name!*”

Throughout his life and ministry on this earth, Jesus showed again and again that he was not one who loved his earthly life, but rather that he hated this life and he loved you and me. That is what his earthly life was all about—accomplishing our salvation. Remember our first reading in the season of Lent? There we saw Jesus in the wilderness, being tempted by the devil. The devil showed Jesus all the wealth and power of the world and said it could be his if only he would bow before him. But Jesus refused. Why? Because he hated this life and he loved you. After Jesus performed the great miracle of feeding the more than 5000 people, they wanted to make him an earthly king, but he refused and he withdrew from the people. Why? Because he hated this life and he loved you. Soon Jesus would face the great challenge of the cross. He endured the whips and the blows and the mockery of the soldiers without lifting even a finger against them to

protect himself. He allowed himself to be nailed to the cross. And when the people taunted him and told him to come down from the cross and save himself, he refused. Why? Because he hated this life and he loved you. Jesus knew that the path to your salvation involved his suffering and death for your sins. And because he loved you, he willingly walked that path of suffering in your place.

And in the process he brought glory to his Father in heaven. When Jesus prayed, “Father, glorify your name,” the voice from heaven responded, “I have glorified it and will glorify it again.” Jesus’ perfect life and his innocent death brought glory to God because this was his Father’s will. He brought further glory to God by his triumphant resurrection from the dead showing that his mission on this earth was complete—proving that he had defeated the devil’s work and won our soul’s salvation. That was why he was here. As Jesus said, “*Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.*” And then notice what he says he next. His final words to his disciples in this reading are these: “*But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.*” Jesus knew that the cross was coming and that he would be lifted up on that cross. He also knew that all men—every human being on earth—would be drawn to that cross.

In a sense, every person on earth stands before the cross of Jesus and is faced with a crisis. There are only two options: either you love the cross and you hate this world or you love this world and you hate the cross. Thank God, he has revealed to us what that cross means. We love the cross because we know, by faith, that the cross is our only hope of salvation. In the cross we find our peace and our hope of eternal glory. Sometimes it becomes difficult to love the cross, however, when we realize what loving the cross also means. It also means taking up our own cross and following Jesus and in this way hating this world with its lies and false promises. That is always a struggle for us on this earth because our sinful nature is always there to tell us to love this life more than the cross of Christ.

And so we continually pray that God would show us the true beauty of his cross and increase our love for the cross more and more every day and, at the same time, decrease our love for this life. That will always be our prayer until the day we cross from this sinful world to the perfect joy of heaven. There we will have no need to hate a sin-filled world, because there will be no more sin. There will only be perfect love unending. Until that day, we pray, “Father, glorify your name in my life.” **Amen.**

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