

Lectionary C April 24, 2016 Easter 5
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, IN
Pastor Roberta Meyer

Acts 11:1-18
Psalm 148
Revelation 21:1-6
John 13:31-35

A Clown Hat, A Sheet full of Meat, and Love

I will never forget her. Her little five-year-old self came to me with a picture she drew. The assignment in my kindergarten class that particular day was to draw a picture of what they wanted to be when they grew up.

Now, I better back up here a moment. Some may know, but most of you don't know I used to be a clown. Hold on, I can hear the snickers. I know I still am a clown. But I mean a real clown in make-up and a big colorful hat. At another church I directed a clown ministry. I also lead a clown group after school at the school where I taught. So she saw me in action. OK, now on with the story.

This cute little curly red haired girl brought me a picture of a clown standing in front of the school. My response: "Oh, you want to be a clown?"

She looked at me with a determined look on her face.
"No, I want to be a teacher."

That stopped me in my tracks. She was watching every aspect of my teacher-hood. And she wanted to do it the way I did it, down to the big colorful hat.

Since Easter we have been talking about what Jesus means with the commandment to "Follow me." And today a deeper meaning of this command is showing up in our lectionary readings. Following Jesus is more than doing the things Jesus does in the places Jesus does them. It is more than taking care of others. There is a whole other aspect to what Jesus means by "Follow me."

Let's look at our text from Acts. In this text Peter has a dream. Three times God spreads out a big sheet and fills it with all kinds of "unclean" critters and tells Peter to get up and eat them. His response is, "*Oh, no, Master. I've never so much as tasted food that wasn't kosher.*" God's answer, "*If God says it's okay, it's okay.*" Through this dream God sends Peter to the Gentiles. He baptizes Captain Cornelius and his household. The Jews got really upset wondering why Peter was baptizing these outsiders. Peter tells the Jews, "*If God gave the same exact gift to them as to us when we believed in the Master Jesus Christ, how could I object to God?*" ...then, as it sank in, [the Jews] started praising God. "*It's really happened! God has broken through to the other nations, opened them up to Life!*"

This was a big deal and it is still a big deal. Laws which once had to be followed to the tee—God just swooped into Peter's dream with a big sheet full of meat and changed them all. And God's explanation—"*If God says it's okay, it's okay.*" See what is happening here? This new

heaven and new earth the Revelation text is talking about is happening. It is happening all the time. *"See, I am making all things new."*

And that is what Jesus is doing in our Gospel from John. *"Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other."*

Jesus, with this commandment, has opened the law to something new. Love trumps all. In Matthews Gospel when asked which commandment was the greatest Jesus said, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."*³⁸ *This is the greatest and first commandment.*³⁹ *And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*⁴⁰ *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."* Jesus puts compassion and caring for others above all the other Jewish laws. That is why eating "unclean" or non-kosher food and working on the Sabbath were no brainers when it came to a choice of helping someone in need.

But there is another aspect of this new radical love Jesus is talking about. Listen to this part again. *"This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other."* Caring for each other even risking our lives for each other is one thing, but the deeper meaning has to do with the ones who are watching us. Following Jesus is a big thing for us and for the one we help, but following Jesus is just as big for the ones observing us.

Loving each other is the best way we can be witnesses to God's Gospel. It is how we spread God's love to those who are watching us. Like that little student of mine was watching me, her teacher. She didn't just look at what I did in the classroom. To her being a teacher meant watching everything I did, including the clown hat.

Following Jesus means everyone is watching us to see what being a child of God means. It means loving trumps everything. It means sharing the table with someone who disagrees with us, or someone who has betrayed us. It means caring for the broken or ugly, smelly or frightening, those that have been walking through the muck. It means defending the ostracized and those discriminated against. Loving others means taking action.

Jesus said, *"Let me give you a new command..."* Jesus' risk taking love for others was new then and it is still opening new ways of loving each other now. As our hearts are opening to Jesus' new commandment we are being watched and some will want to copy what we do, some will want to be just like us.

What does this have to do with our Earth day celebration? Well, you fill in the blanks. We will be seen outside today working and praying with our Fresh Air Friends, digging in the dirt. planting, cleaning, caring. We don't know what our observers will pick up on as important to them. We are commanded by Jesus to just love. If we do everything with God's Love in mind, whatever they see us doing, will be just fine.

Oh, by the way, did anyone bring a clown hat? Amen.