Love as Resistance
Rev Grace Cox
Year C, 5th Sunday of Easter
Acts 11:1-18; John 13:31-35
18 May 2025

In New Orleans, in 1960, in the deep heat of racial segregation, a six-year-old Black girl named Ruby Bridges became the first child to integrate into an all-white school. Every morning, she walked past mobs of angry white adults—grown men and women screaming slurs, throwing objects, threatening her very life. The images from that time are haunting: Ruby, so small, her hair neatly tied back, her hands clutching her schoolbooks, flanked on both sides by federal marshals. Alone, yet courageous.

But there's another image—an unseen one—that carries just as much power. Every morning before she left home, Ruby knelt beside her mother and prayed: "Please, God, forgive them, because they don't know what they're doing." This wasn't a child merely parroting words. Ruby later said that prayer became a lifeline. A radical discipline. A choice to meet hatred with grace, fear with courage, and violence with the resistance of love. Love, in Ruby's story, was not soft or sentimental. It was not passive or polite. It was bold. It was defiant. This love was resistance.

In John 13, we find Jesus gathered with His disciples in the upper room. It is the night of the Last Supper. A tender moment, yes—but also a moment thick with tension. Judas has already left the table. The cross is looming. Betrayal is unfolding. And it's in this moment—this sacred, sorrow-filled hour—that Jesus turns to the ones He loves and says:

> "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." (John 13:34, NRSV)

This love is not sweet. This love is not quiet. This is not the kind of love that makes people comfortable. No, this is a love spoken in the shadow of imperial violence. It is a love spoken as power closes in, as fear lurks just outside the door. It is a love that calls us to stand firm—not with weapons or walls, but with open hands and open hearts. It is the love of Jesus, who loves even when He knows the betrayal is coming. Who kneels to wash the feet of His disciples, even the one who will sell Him out.

This is love as moral courage. This is love as disruption. This is love that refuses to play by the rules of empire. Because Jesus' love was never neutral. He healed those who had no means to pay. He spoke to women no one else would acknowledge. He touched the untouchable, forgave the unforgivable, and invited the unworthy to dine at the table. He turned over temple tables. He wept for the suffering of His people. He showed up—again and again—for the ones others tried to erase. This is not the love of comfort. This is the love of protest. The love of resistance.

The theologian Cornel West once said: "Justice is what love looks like in public." And Jesus is the embodiment of that justice. So when He says, "Love one another as I have loved you," He's not asking us to simply feel kindness in our hearts. He's calling us to live lives of holy resistance. To love like Jesus is to refuse to let hatred define the narrative. It is to say: I will not mirror your violence. I will not adopt your fear. I will not conform to your cruelty. Instead, I will stand, like Ruby, walking through crowds of hatred with grace.

This radical love has been practiced by saints and ordinary people alike across history. In Nazi Germany, a small group of students and a professor at the University of Munich formed a resistance group called The White Rose. They were Christians, moved by conscience, who believed their faith demanded more than silent survival. So they printed pamphlets—simple pages filled with moral appeals and denunciations of the regime—and distributed them, risking arrest and execution. One of their writings proclaimed, "We will not be silent. We are your bad

conscience. The White Rose will not leave you in peace!" They did not fight with weapons. They did not wage war. They resisted with words, with truth, with love for their neighbour and a fierce commitment to justice. Hans and Sophie Scholl, two of the core members, were arrested and executed. But their legacy lives on. Their love was resistance. Their faith was public. Their courage was costly.

Love like this is not a feeling. It is a practice. It is the protest of presence in a world that erases. It is a song of mercy in a land of shouting. It is the unshakable conviction that every person bears the image of God—even those we would rather not include. To love in this way is to put our faith on the line. To say with our actions: this Gospel is real, and it changes everything.

This kind of love—this radical, Christ-like, Ruby Bridges, Hans and Sophie Scholl kind of love—is what we are called to. This is the mark of discipleship. Not the absence of fear, but the presence of love even in the face of it.

So what does it look like today?

It looks like standing with queer and trans youth whose safety is under threat. It looks like advocating for policies that restore dignity to refugees and migrants. It looks like naming racism, misogyny, and economic injustice without flinching. It looks like forgiving without excusing, resisting without retaliating. It looks like staying soft-hearted in a hard world. It looks like love. Love as resistance, as courage and as public witness.

So let us love like Ruby, who walked through storms of hate with a steady stride. Let us love like Hans and Sophie, who chose truth over silence. Let us love like Jesus, who knelt to serve even those who would hurt Him. Let us love like people who believe that love still has power.

The power to unmake violence.

The power to heal trauma.

The power to build beloved community.

Because love is resistance. Love is power. And love is the way of Christ.

Amen