

SERMON

Year C – 5th Sunday of Easter – May 15, 2022

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Like the resurrected Jesus says to Mary Magdalene, “Do not cling.” You cannot cling even to the Resurrected Christ. The soul, growing into God, must abandon even this Presence, this revelation, this comfort. In this Easter time, in this time of detachment from the physical Jesus, a mystical union takes place, and, ultimately, with this maturity, the responsibility of bearing the good news in a broken world. The Rev. Suzanne Guthrie, Episcopal priest and author

Anyone else feel like we recently heard today’s Gospel? Perhaps it stuck in my head because it is a portion of the Maundy Thursday Gospel that I preached on just a few weeks ago. But don’t worry; I didn’t recycle that sermon for this week! However, it is interesting, at least to me, that when you take a Gospel passage out of its literary context, the meaning can change for you.

In today’s selection, we are reminded to love as Jesus did. Quite a challenge! As we hear the Gospel stories, it seems like Jesus loved everyone! As our Eucharistic Prayer states Jesus ate with outcasts and sinners, healed the sick and brought Good News to the poor. He welcomed prostitutes, the unclean and the unloved by stretching the boundaries of what most of us would consider to be love. Jesus welcomed all and loved all...unconditionally. And today we hear once again that we are to do the same.

Absolutely, to love as Jesus loved presents quite a challenge. It requires us to widen our understanding of what love is and what forms it may take. The type of love Jesus asks us to demonstrate toward all is not the sweet sentimentality expressed in a Hallmark card; the romantic poetry of Valentine's Day but the type of love that calls us to live and perhaps to die for one another. This love requires us to embody gentleness, generosity, patience and action. When we speak of Jesus and love, as you have heard from this pulpit and from other preachers, love is not a noun but a verb. For if we see in Jesus an example of how we are to think and be and live, then love calls us to action in the world.

There is much happening in the world today that requires our action: war and conflicts, disease, economic conditions that increasingly create hardship for people due to a growing inequity in the distribution of wealth and especially for those people already living in poverty. The list goes on and on. So, if we are to love one another as Jesus loved, where do we begin?

In the Gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry on earth, we hear the range of actions that demonstrate what it means to love as Jesus did. To love as Jesus loved means welcoming all and being of service to others. We hear stories of service born out of compassion in the changing of water to wine at the marriage feast in Cana or displayed in acts of mercy such as curing the ill and the blind. Love may be demonstrated in dialogue with people considered to be outcasts or on the margins such as in the story of the woman at the well. And love may be shown in the lowliest of acts such as washing the feet of the disciples at the Last Supper. Jesus' example of self-giving humble love and service is the antithesis of what we observe in today's capitalist economic system which values power, advantage and domination.

But if you have ever truly loved someone, you know that love requires risk. In our most loving relationships, we make ourselves vulnerable to the other through our honesty. And in Jesus's actions, we see that love can require acts that encompass truly great risk, like challenging the state and religious authorities, which may result in torture and execution.

Let's be real, though. Loving as Jesus did is a tough assignment. We are busy people and have multiple and serious responsibilities that must be fulfilled. We can't walk around telling stories and doing miracles. Can we? What if we start small; we can start where we are. We can love those closest to us and move our loving actions from there into the larger community.

Jesus loved his disciples who didn't always get the idea of love as an action correct, either. Judas betrayed him, Peter denied him and John and the women were the only ones present at His death on the cross. In Jesus, we learn that love is not based on merit but is freely given!

Remember our God is a Trinity: one God in three persons...a communion of infinite generosity and unhindered giving and receiving among three. This Divine Life loves us because love is the very nature and shape of God; God is Love. It is this type of love that Jesus call us to enact, to be. We are, as his followers, to not merely be united by a common purpose but to share a common existence in which Christ lives in and through each of us. The Church, we the disciples of Jesus in the world today, has the privilege and the responsibility to pass love among each other as a means to make God's work visible and possible. The church was never meant to be a chosen elite, a sort of country club for the saved, but living communities of love that can eventually change the world by giving to all dignity and respect as equal children of God.

This love is the very structure of the universe and we are to live inside it and then, through this realization, live out our deepest purpose and identity. As the Franciscan theologian, Richard Rohr, reminds us “love is not something we do now and then; love is who we are all the time because we are made in the image and likeness of God.” By His life, Jesus taught us we are to love as God loves. Just as Jesus’ deeds flowed from His connection with the One who sent Him, our deeds as His followers should flow from our shared unity with God through Jesus and one another in the mystical Body of Christ.

If we are to love one another as Jesus loves, then we perform loving acts in His name...acts of service and sacrifice, acts that demonstrate God’s love is still at work in the world through us in the name of Jesus Christ. We are able to achieve such actions through God’s grace granted freely to us which allows us to love another with disregard for divisions or any other human construct. As we grow in our appreciation of what oneness of the Body of Christ can be in a practical way in this earthly life, our lives become testimony to creation of the world of peace, love and justice that Jesus preached. These strong ties within the mystical body of Christ are, and must be, stronger than any other connections we have. We are reminded of our oneness with God and each other whenever we come to the Table. We are members one of another, not always agreeing, but still not separated by divisions along political party lines, conservative or liberal thinking, country loyalties or language differences, or racial or cultural differences. If we can achieve that goal, that recognition of Oneness, through our acts of love for one another, then we truly can create modern day miracles!

AMEN!

