

Sunday, May 6, 2018  
6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Rev. Robert W. Brown

SERMON

Love One Another

**SCRIPTURE READING - John 15:9-17**

**INTRODUCTION:**

This weeks reading is from the Gospel of John Chapter 15 verses 9 through 17. It is just an excerpt from a 4-chapter monologue known as the "farewell discourse". Here we find Jesus with his disciples at the last supper. Jesus is certain that tonight will be their last time together before he is arrested and killed by the Empire. To fully understand the farewell discourse it's important to know its context. Jesus is engaged in critically important pastoral care. He urgently needs his followers to know that his imminent departure is not abandonment, but rather the necessary next step that will make a way for even deeper intimacy. What could be interpreted, as stern imperatives are actually reassuring words of care and warm encouragement that will lead them through the dark valley just ahead. The farewell discourse is the essential instruction that reliably guides the disciples - and us - from simply following the human Jesus to a mystically vibrant connection to the Cosmic Christ.

Hear these tender Words of God given to the seekers of God from the Gospel of John.

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**SCRIPTURE:**

[Jesus said:] "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any

longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another."

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Generally speaking, I don't like to disagree with Jesus. But, sometimes, when I'm reading the Gospels, I just think what he asks of us is impossible! Like when he says to "love your enemies" or "forgive those who persecute you." And here, in this monologue he **commands** us to love one another! You can't **command** somebody to love. It's like when you got into a fight on the schoolyard and the teacher **commanded** you shake hands. No one believes that is for real.

However, I have found that, in the end, disagreeing with Jesus never goes well for me. So, through self-inflicted pain, suffering, and defiant struggle, I have finally learned that I should probably at least **try** to understand his point of view.

Let us pray...

*Holy God, sometimes we have trouble following your commands. We go our own way to our own detriment. Help us to risk following your commands so that our joy may be full. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to You our Rock and our Redeemer.*

Once upon a time, there was once an intentional community of Christians who lived and worked together in the remote hills just outside San Sebastian, Spain. It was known simply as "The Village". These people took their Bible seriously. Guided by the first intentional Christian community chronicled in the book of acts, they sold all their possessions and lived as one, giving freely to any who had need, welcoming the stranger, caring for orphans and widows, living off the land and loving one another just as Christ commanded. Visitors would frequently come to The Village and marvel at what Christianity might look like. Their joy was so remarkably evident and authentic that many joined The Village, and the community prospered in unity and peace.

Inevitably, after a time, the founding fathers and mothers died or left the group for various reasons. It wasn't long before seeds of discontent began to germinate; petty resentments took root. Discontent was fueled by suspicions that gained validity in the shadowed corners of gossip and accusation. The once unified village quickly unraveled into divisions. As tensions mounted, blame was

targeted on the new wave of leaders who allowed this discord to flourish. Pinning responsibility on one small group unified the other factions whose growing anxiety desperately sought the quickest way to find relief. Soon, many simply left, disillusioned and disgusted. Visitors no longer came and The Village faded into a bitter outpost of disgruntled people.

This really shouldn't have surprised them. If they had only read further in the Book of Acts they would have noticed that even that first utopian dream only lasted about 45 minutes before trouble began to erode even that foundation!

One day, the last remaining leader, a young man who grew up in The Village, suddenly remembered an elderly woman who was there at the beginning. Years ago she had retreated to a hermitage seeking solitude and quiet. He decided to travel a day's walk through the forest and another day's climb up a mountain in hopes of finding the woman still alive. Perhaps she would have a solution that would restore the joy and renovate the decaying Village.

Finally he found her, napping in a rocking chair on the front porch of the rickety hermitage. When the old woman awoke she listened carefully to his sad tale about how the beloved community had grown jealous and petty in their relationships. The animosity was so great, he told her, that even the few visitors that did come felt only tension and quickly left. All joy had evaporated.

After a long silence the old woman told him that she had just now dreamt of the situation and had received a vision. She leaned in close, as if someone might hear, and whispered, "The Messiah is among you even now." The young man was stunned. One among them was the Messiah! Who could it be? He knew it wasn't he, but who? He raced back to The Village and shared his exciting news.

Everyone grew silent as they looked into each other's faces. Was this one the Messiah?

From that day on the mood in the community began to shift. Rodriguez started talking to Gabriel again, because neither wanted to be guilty of slighting the Messiah. Maria and Marta let go of their frosty anger and sought out each other's forgiveness. They all began serving each other, looking out for opportunities to assist. Where offence had once been given and received, they sought healing and forgiveness. After a while, joy began to emerge once again.

As one traveler, then another stumbled upon The Village, word spread about the remarkable spirit and sense of joy that seemed to envelop the place. People once again began to take the journey to bask in the warm glow of this peaceful

Christian community. Visitors would leave renewed and transformed. Truly the Messiah was among them.

Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst.”<sup>1</sup> To be a Christian community is to gather in the name of Jesus and love one another, to see through the pettiness of personal preference, to question the immediate compulsion that needs to find blame when things get tough. To love one another is to humbly acknowledge that we are all wounded. We are all in need of healing, yearning for grace, seeking forgiveness and worthy of acceptance. From the cradle to the grave, Jesus says that we belong to one another. Following in the Way of Jesus means that, come what may, we need to care for one another and love one another as if every person we see is, in fact, Divine. Somehow, named or unnamed, the Messiah lives in each one of us.

Every relationship we have, every culture or community we belong to creates what philosopher and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin called a “psychic unity” or a third self that exists simply because we exist together in relationship to one another. Jesus tells us if we want to reflect God’s perfect realm and live in peace we must learn to love one another across all boundaries, just as he did.

When resentment, anger, blame and anxiety dominate our lives we need to step back and seek the wisdom of an old woman living in a hermitage deep within our soul. Finding our way to love one another, even in our disagreements and mutual woundedness, is the distilled essence, the very core of all that Jesus taught and demonstrated for us. To nurture our “psychic unity” is to cultivate a tree of hope in the field of despair; a deeply rooted tree that can withstand the even the strongest storms that threaten to tear it up. This is a tree that bears ripe, delicious fruit to feed a world that is starving for a peaceful, affirming community. Sometimes it gets hard to tend to the tree, but to find our joy we must first bear the fruit of love and trust. Jesus said that the **only** way we can truly live out our faith is through love and trust.

Whenever we lose our humility and refuse to seek out mutuality across differences, relationships deteriorate. Whenever resentment blinds us to the truth of our deep inner-connectedness we lose our way. Whenever we are no longer able to freely give and receive from one another, the Holy Spirit of God that is the source of all true joy evaporates among us, leaving only discord and strife.

This is why Jesus spoke these words with such urgency in his final discourse. He emphatically tells his disciples that the **only** way to live in unity with God and

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 18:20

know the fullness of deep joy is to love one another just as He loved them. We must choose to love like Jesus for the sake of joy.

And then, as if to demonstrate the power of this mystical union between God and humanity Jesus gathered them around the table for a meal. He deliberately chose to eat with his betrayer; he chose to eat with the one who would deny him and the one who doubted him. He totally knew that when things got tough they would all abandon him, so he gave them bread and wine and said, love one another, stay with one another, forgive one another as I forgive you and do this often to remember me and our sacred covenant. Do this so that your joy may be full.

For two thousand years Christians have gathered around this table to claim forgiveness and remember how love heals our wounds, redeems our mistakes and binds us together even across differences. Let us come together now in this psychic unity and celebrate this precious tradition so that together we might bear the fruit that lasts and our joy may be full.