



SUNDAY SERMON

Love one another, as I have loved you

"I give you a new commandment," said Jesus, "that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." Words so familiar. Fundamental. Spoken during the last supper. In the upper room. With the disciples. In Jerusalem. The end is near. Those familiar with Jesus' story have heard these words and pictured this scene so often, we might imagine that last night was planned.

But I wonder if, in truth, Jesus was improvising. He knew that his time was short. His disciples had been with him for quite a while now, wherever he went, watching, listening, learning. Still they didn't understand, not fully. How could they? Soon the authorities would come for him. This was his last opportunity. To give them something that summed it all up, so they'd remember; to show them. So he took a pitcher of water and a basin. He washed their feet. It's not really a pleasant thing, washing someone else's feet. That was the point, I think. The master on his knees, washing the feet of those who serve. It's visceral, intimate.

What will help them understand? Keep in mind the obvious fact that Jesus was Jewish; a teacher, a rabbi. I always remember our seminary dean describing the difference between Greek learning and Hebrew learning. Imagine a pool, he said, with a diving board, a high diving board. If you asked the Greek teacher to tell you how high is the diving board, she would calculate the lengths of the axes, measure the angles, double check the numbers, and give you the height, precisely.

If you asked the Hebrew teacher, he'd tell you to close your eyes, picture yourself climbing the ladder of the diving board. You get to the top. Keep your eyes closed. You feel the board with your bare feet, and hold onto the rails on each side and slowly make your way out onto the board. Now, at some point, there's no more rail. So you inch along, feeling your way with your toes, until you get to the end. Then you open your eyes and look down. And the feeling in your stomach... that's how high that board is.

Looking around at them gathered expectantly, Jesus took a piece of bread, and said, "this is my body." All of you take a piece and eat some. I am in you, and we are one. Here's some wine. Drink it. Remember this night always. Judas was still with them, at the table. Jesus gave him the bread and the wine, too. Shared it all together. Then Judas went out. To betray him. "And," the text says, "it was night." Just after Judas left the room – the clock now ticking until the authorities would come – Jesus looked at them. What more to say, or teach? No doctrine, no dogma, no fancy explanations now. Love one another. Wash one another's feet. Feed one another. I am in you, and we are one. Love one another.

continued

DATE

Easter 5
Sunday, May 19, 2019

PREACHER

The Rev. Ledlie Laughlin

John 13:31-35

I don't believe we were meant to make this more complicated than it is. It's not complicated. It's hard – to do. It's challenging alright. I think we're meant to live it... in real time, in real ways. Not just in church, or with our liturgies, or at holy times. Not waiting until we're at our most generous, gracious best selves. Love one another. It's about relationship. Jesus had to improvise in real time. So do we, in relationships. It's usually not neat and tidy, doesn't always feel good, isn't always pleasant. The people we love. The people who love us.

Anyone have a parent whom they love? A partner? Grandparents, children, spouses, friends, neighbors, other people in church. Loving these people. Changing diapers, getting out the door on time, setting boundaries, celebrating holidays, sharing hugs, discovering new things, fighting and forgiving. Love one another. Through-out John's text in this section, the you – as in, I have loved you, and you also should love – the you is plural. Its collective. Jesus is telling the lot of them, figure it out - together. The bread, the body of Christ; it's in all of you, in everyone. Before you even get to the business of loving your neighbor, attend to the family, the beloved community.

I'm thinking about the conversations some of us have been having about safety, and having a police officer, and how that makes people feel about whether they are welcome, or how guests and any other of God's children will feel welcome, and inclusion, and fear, and love, and race, and we all want to do the best we can so that its safe here, for each of us and all of us, in a way that reflects our values, to treat one another with integrity and honor. And it is hard.

I'm thinking about the countless leaves and doves that the vision and planning team gathered (as part of our strategic planning) – from you: in your own words, in conversations, as you reported what feeds you here, what you cherish, what you hope for our future as a congregation. Many themes came through loud and clear: the importance of community, of feeling broken and receiving comfort, healing, of being alone and finding others, of being hungry – spiritually, emotionally, physically – and being fed. Of seeking to pray and walk in the way of Christ – and receiving light. Of youth who want more ways to engage and lead, especially in works of outreach and justice, And lots of us want more ways to get together to have fun, play, rejoice. This statements came both as affirmation of what is and aspiration of what could be: to sort this out – as we get together week after week; to pray, eat, help, teach, learn, sing, plan, cry, laugh, pray some more – always widening the circle... of Jesus' love.

"Love – as I have loved you." So, how did Jesus love? (With thanks to John Claypool), St. Augustine offers two clues. Augustine observed: Jesus loved each one he ever met as if there were none other in all the world to love. Jesus' love was for each individual person. He embraced the particular and the unique in each human being. I've got to think that, even for Jesus, this was an extraordinary commitment and discipline because he came in contact with so many people, he must have found it tempting to lump people together in categories, in classes. I do not think I am being totally naive to say that even though such an ideal is a tremendous reach, it is within the possibility of every one of us.

I love the story about the little boy who's trying to learn the Lord's Prayer. One night he knelt by his bed and prayed:

Our Father, who art in heaven
How do you know my name?

To know each one by name: we're made in the image of that extraordinary love.

The second clue St. Augustine offers is that Jesus loved all as he loved each. The way he loved was not only personal; it was also universal. Those eyes out of which Jesus looked when he lived among us were never filled with contempt or disdain. Even when his words were harsh, it was because of a concern he felt for those whom he addressed. The opposite of love is not anger but indifference. There is not one example of Jesus turning away from another as if what happened to that one made no difference to him.

We're invited to love as Jesus loved: he loved each one he ever met as if there were none other in all the world to love, and he loved all as he loved each.

And to do so today. Right now. With these very people. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples: that you love one another. Amen.