

**6 Easter  
May 9, 2021**

**In the name of God, who in Jesus,  
taught us the meaning of unconditional Love.  
AMEN**

I would expect we all know that today is Mothers' Day and certainly most of us had loving mothers, so I think this sermon, which is all about Love, is quite appropriate.

Our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, has written a lovely book entitled "Love is the Way" in which he has much that could be quoted, because the name of his book is quite appropriate as he presents why Love is the best and strongest way to have a better world. For example, he wrote, "Walk and talk in the manner of Love, for God is Love. This is a call to be the change you would like to see. Each day brings opportunities to unite or divide, to provoke anger or model compassion.

Prayer means many things to many people, but it can certainly be a means to move toward a more intentional way of living, to be relieved from the bondage of self."

I hope everyone has really paid attention to today's Scripture readings, because in all of today's lessons we are being made aware of a grace / and a presence beyond ourselves, a reality that we do not direct. // In the first reading, from the Acts of the Apostles, we see the way the Spirit of God changes everything; the Spirit changes the lives of everyone present, shattering their assumptions. //// And then the psalm praises the presence, and the activity of God in human affairs, in our lives, acknowledging God as judge of all, in a sense what our own Prayer Book Prayer says: ..."God, from whom no secrets are hidden."////In the second reading, we are reminded that faith itself, is not an achievement on our part... but a gift from God. I'm not sure we realize that. If we did, then surely we would have grateful hearts for that gift of faith. ///// And then, in the Gospel, our Lord tells us that his Love will give us the direction and the power to do what he commands, for our own soul's sake....for the sake of Love.

In thinking of the message from the Gospel of John that we have just heard...it is as if we are sitting in the presence of our Lord, near the final hours of his earthly life. His intensity comes from his clear knowledge that he has little time left with these disciples of his, these fragile and vulnerable people, as we are, whom he loves, and to whom he has entrusted his hopes for the future.

Of all the passages in John's Gospel, this one is addressed most immediately to these disciples. One can easily imagine the scene. As he speaks, he probably makes eye contact again and again. This message is for them, and they are never to forget these quiet words. We, who are today's disciples, also must never forget what Jesus said. So let's review what we heard in the Gospel./// /To begin with, Jesus said: *Abide in my love*. On several recent Sundays our Gospel has reminded us that this is an absolutely primary command. Abide in my love. Significantly, Jesus does not say that we are to abide in love, but, rather, in MY love...in God's LOVE. We ourselves, whose capacity

for love is limited, are not the source of the deepest and strongest love. To love faithfully and strongly we have the source of love beyond our own. We are to abide, to dwell, to totally live in our Lord's Love./// Strange that it should need to be commanded! I guess it is because our Lord knows that his disciples, then and now, just don't get it about how that is the very best way to live and to have life abundantly. Our Lord knows, and he wants them and us to trust that. In fact, that is why he came for us.

Jesus then continues: *If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.* Abiding in the love of Jesus is not an exercise in discipline or well-meant sentimentality. To abide in the love of Christ is to know the challenges of loving, to be diligent in the task of overcoming the very human temptation to love oneself more than anyone else, you know, to try to keep ourselves comfortable first, and then maybe be mindful of the needs of others, to put oneself first in one's considerations. It's about Me, My, Mine.

But Jesus continues to insist that to have life and to have it abundantly we are to focus on loving others, and he delivers his GREAT commandment: In fact, He says: *This is my great commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.* It is significant that when this commandment is quoted, the last five words are frequently omitted. Remember those words are: AS I HAVE LOVED YOU. When you think of it, those words are probably left out with good reason, because to love as Jesus has loved, is to love without limit. Quite understandably, this dismays us, with our limited human capacity for self-sacrificing love. To get ourselves out of the way, to love another more than we love ourselves is the way of our Lord, and it is what he wants of us, really for our own soul's well-being. But, oh how hard we find that is to really live out. To really want the well-being of another, even to want their own spiritual health more than our own

To assist us, our Lord makes this tremendous statement: *I do not call you servants any longer...but I have called you friends.* Strange... how it is not easy for us to accept this gift. I have noticed that the term "servant" appears in countless hymns, but rarely in hymns are we called FRIENDS of Jesus.

Nor is it easy for us to accept that Jesus said, *"you did not choose me, but I chose you."* We feel like the writer of the psalm when he wrote that "such knowledge is too wonderful for me...I cannot attain to it." Or we feel like Peter... in the boat on the lake... when he is overcome by a sense of being utterly unworthy of the friendship he has encountered in Jesus, of the genuine Love Jesus gives.

Finally, the disciples of all time are given our vocation, simply and directly, our marching orders. Jesus says, *"I appoint you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last."* Can we possibly measure up to this great command!? Well, certainly of ourselves, we cannot. BUT, the Good News is that we are not alone. There is a further word for the disciples: Jesus says, *"The Father will give you whatever you ask in my name"*.

And so there we have it. Jesus gave all, all that he was, all that he had, all that he knew, he gave it ALL to the disciples. He truly believed that LOVE, sacrificial Love, is the key to the Kingdom of God, which he said had come near.

The beautiful Prayer in our Book of Common Prayer, that is known as The Prayer of St. Francis, puts it this way:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let us sow love.  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is discord, union;

Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
Where there is sadness, joy.  
Grant that we may not seek so much  
To be consoled as to console;  
To be understood as to understand;  
To be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

If we truly are to represent Godly living, our work is cut out for us. Shouldn't we always strive to shine the light of Christ? Shouldn't we each strive to make the world a better place now, right where we are, and not at some time in the future, but now?

Either people, precisely like you and me, will be busy on behalf of Jesus, manifesting the difference it makes to follow Jesus Christ as our Lord of ALL of our life, or the work God expects of us simply will not get done.

I would like to close with a little story that may be known by some of you. But listen closely:

*It seems that Jesus was talking with an angel about his ministry on earth. The angel asked what the heart of his mission was. Jesus responded that it was to teach his disciples to Love one another as he loves them. The angel then asked, "Well, what became of your work? Jesus replied, "I left it in the hands of my disciples." The angel questioned further: "What if they fail?" Jesus smiled and said, "I have no other plan!"*

AMEN