



SERMONS THAT WORK

Easter 6 (A)

What's Love Got to Do with It?

[RCL] Acts 17:22-31; Psalm 66:7-18; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21

There are several occasions throughout the year that are specifically aimed at showing one's love to others. Think about Valentine's Day. It is a special day when we send flowers, candy, or cards to loved ones. What initially was a day for spouses and romantic partners has morphed into a day to show love for friends, children, and yes, even pets. There is another day set aside to acknowledge love for grandparents, godparents, and others in addition to birthday celebrations and the like. Today's gospel reminds us how to celebrate daily and show love for God.

It is easy to show love one day or a couple of days annually when everything is prescribed for you. Demonstrating love on a daily basis is a bit more complicated. If you have children, there are times when you think, "I really love you, but I don't like you right now." We may think the same about our superiors at work and even about friends and colleagues in the church. Love is a complicated feeling, and yet Jesus tells us "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." In the text from the Gospel of Mark, Jesus says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength," and, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these." It is hoped that every time you hear these words, there will be a pause in your spirit and you will be drawn even closer to Jesus. The ability to provide unconditional love to all humans is a big ask and oftentimes a heavy lift. There is still, however, a set requirement that Jesus has imposed for faith followers to employ as a demonstration of the love they have for God. Adriana Locke once said, "The best things in life don't come easy, but those things are the ones worth the sacrifice." Jesus knew that loving everyone all the time was a monumental task and he also knew that achieving that goal would create a profound shift in the ways in which we move toward the Beloved Community.

When you consider the disciples who were in his inner circle, it is very plausible that Jesus was exasperated with them often. It must have been difficult to *like* them all the time, much less *love* them all the time. For as much as he had done with them and in front of them and for them, there was still confusion and doubt in the ranks. When Jesus told them that he was leaving them and that he was going ahead to prepare a place for them – and they knew the way to where he was going – Thomas immediately said, "No, Jesus, we don't get it. We are not sure where you are going, how can we know the way." The disciple Philip still wanted proof of God. He said, "Just show us the father and we will be satisfied." Can you imagine Jesus

sighing and rolling his eyes while looking at his brothers, wondering why they were still mystified by his death on a cross and now his resurrection?

Had he not told them repeatedly what was to happen? He had assured them that his crucifixion would not be the last word. He demonstrated his love for them at the last supper. He fed them, he talked with them, and he even got down on his knees and washed their feet. He offered all the comfort that he could before his death. With all of that love, surely one might think they would recognize the love they had received and would offer that same level of affection to others. Yet we know that following Jesus' death, the disciples went to an upper room and were hiding out, fearing for their lives. They were not filled with love, they were overwhelmingly clinging to grief. They were not excited about the Jesus we know who was raised from the dead, rather they were trying to figure out what they should do in the absence of Jesus.

When we are true believers, we stand firm in our belief that the risen Lord loves us unconditionally and our task is to share that love with others. In our daily faith walk, we must come to a place where love is the driving force in all that we do and say. Our promise to Jesus is to love him and keep his commandments, which includes loving ourselves, and sometimes even that is difficult. There are days when people blame themselves for what has happened to them, including domestic violence, the end of relationships, and even the deaths of loved ones. There are other times when people make bad choices and have difficulty receiving love and forgiveness as they move through a process of repentance. Jesus says, in spite of all those things, continue to love yourself.

Now there is the second part. Love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus makes it clear that every human being deserves to be loved. Love demands a level of respect and equality that cannot be deviated from. There are those who will be tempted, like the expert in the law in Luke, to ask, "But who is my neighbor?" At the end of the day, the answer is crystal clear. Neighbor is a reference that encompasses all of those you will meet on your journey of life. You may ask, "What does love of neighbor look like?" Presiding Bishop Michael Curry often says, "If it's not about love, it's not about God."

So, what does love have to do with it? Jesus loves us so much that he vowed to secure an advocate for us. The Spirit of truth is an innate being that we carry with us all our lives. The Advocate keeps us focused on the love of God and the knowledge that it is impossible to love God and to hate your neighbor. Remember the words found in 1 John 4:20: "Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate a brother or sister are liars, for those who do not love a brother or sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen."

We should never fear love. It informs how well we show up in the world. We speak to our neighbors. We acknowledge those who are different from us. We embrace the unknown and, by God's grace, we stand firm for equity and equality. That's the love that Jesus is looking for. Love also creates space within each and every one of us to be creative and find solutions for the problems of the world. With love leading the way, we are equipped to tackle climate change and child hunger. We will find cures for deadly diseases and viruses. All of those changes come when we love our neighbors and cannot bear to see others suffer.

Jesus said, “They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.” Let every day be Valentine’s Day. The love of Jesus should be revealed through us every day of the year. The beauty of the heart is its amazing ability to expand so there are no limits to the joy you can exude because of your relationship with the triune God. Take time to take stock of your willingness to live out the Gospel in your community and in your church and in your home. Only then will you truly understand what love has to do with it. Amen.

***The Rev. Kathleen Walker** is the missioner for Black ministries in the Diocese of North Carolina. She joined the bishop’s staff in 2020 to focus on the vitality of historically Black congregations by helping to weave their diversity into a closer bond of inclusion with other parishes and the diocese. The goal is to ensure all predominantly Black congregations have the best opportunity to make the fullest use of the resources of their parishes, partnerships, and the diocese. Rev. Kathy graduated from Virginia Theological Seminary in 2018 and shortly thereafter joined the clergy team at St. John’s Episcopal Church in Tallahassee, Fla., as associate rector for pastoral care and parish life. She is originally from South Florida and was an active layperson in that diocese prior to discerning the call to ordained ministry.*