

5.15.2022 Easter 5

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Acts 11:1-18, Psalm 148, Revelation 21:1-6, John 13:31-35

“Love One Another”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

In this morning’s gospel Jesus tells his disciples, and us, that if we have love for one another, “*everyone will know that you are my disciples.*” In saying this, Jesus makes his *agape* love the foundation of his church, saying, “*as I have loved you, you should also love one another.*”

Jesus’ new commandment of love is “new” precisely because it comes from Jesus, who makes all things new. When Jesus says, “*I give you a new commandment,*” he uses the word “new” which means “unprecedented” and “unheard of.” In the ancient world, Greek philosophy posited that philanthropy (*philanthrōpía*, φιλάνθρωπία) was the highest form of love. Philanthropy is the compound of *phila* and *anthropos*, meaning, “love for humanity.” Philanthropy continues to be a much-needed concept in the world. Much good continues to be done by people who share their wealth and possessions for the good of others – for the love of humanity.

The ancient Greeks were quite right in highly esteeming philanthropy because a love for humanity is what makes us human. This is why the hatred of humanity seen in war, genocide, racism, and discrimination is so dangerous. Daily we are confronted by people who have lost sight of the love and concern for humanity that makes us all human. Rather than using our resources to care for others, humanity continues to hate, attack and kill others rather than caring for others.

And so we arrive at the gospel reading for today, the scene of the Jesus’ last meal with his disciples. Judas Iscariot, who had lost sight of his love of Jesus, had just gone out to betray him. Jesus responds to this betrayal saying, “*Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him.*” Jesus was speaking about his love, which would be made complete in his self-sacrifice on the cross for the world. Jesus now also commands his followers to live by this love as well.

What does this love of Jesus look like? Perhaps the best known example of this *agape* love is the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan was a foreigner, an outsider to the Jewish people, and yet he embodied Jesus’ *agape* love for others. Though he was the Other, he showed compassion and mercy for his neighbor who had been robbed, beaten and left to die on the side of the road. The love of Jesus’ new commandment is personal; it is no longer a general philanthropic

love for humanity, it is a self-sacrificing love for a fellow human being. The Good Samaritan got involved. The Good Samaritan carried the beaten man to an inn, paying for his care and lodging.

Jesus also welcomed the stranger, the outcast and the unclean; he cared for the sick and dying. He broke bread with sinner, called the tax collector and the prostitute. Jesus' love went beyond a general philanthropic love for humanity to a personal and self-sacrificing love for his neighbor.

So when Jesus said, "*As I have moved you,*" he was describing a love that is compassionate and merciful; he was describing the justice of God. Jesus came with justice, restoring individual human lives into God's kingdom of love and justice. Jesus redrew the boundaries of the kingdom of God, reaching out onto the margins of society to that all might be brought into the kingdom.

The love of Jesus went beyond a general philanthropic love of humanity to a love for those whom the world had forgotten, ignored and hated. Often what is called "love" is specific to one's family and community, one's tribe or nation; yet, it is also often very exclusive. It is a partial love because it also excludes those who are different. The love of Jesus welcomes difference, transforming humanity in all its diversity into the body of Christ. Paul described what happens in baptism as all are made into one body where there is "no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, but all are one in Christ" (Galatians 3:28). The church is to become the living example of the agape love of Jesus, welcoming all people and thereby redrawing the lines of human community with inclusion, justice and peace.

The agape love of Jesus seeks to change the shape of the world by bringing the Good News of God's kingdom to the margins of the world so that all people are included in this kingdom. This is what makes Jesus' commandment to love new. God loves and welcomes all people, not just those like us, but all humanity in its fullness and diversity. This love casts out hate, violence, and injustice.

In the reading from Revelation this morning the word "new" is also used three times – a *new* heaven and a *new* earth and the voice saying, "*See, I am making all things new.*" As Easter people, we are to be living signs of the in-breaking of God's kingdom in this world, and the hope of a new heaven and a new earth – a place where the sea no longer exists. What does this mean for the sea to no longer exist? The sea is a boundary that separates people from one another; the sea represents places of disputes and territorial battles. Today we, of course, simply fly over the seas, but that is the point, we have to fly over it – it is a boundary. The sea is a symbol of our human

separation from one another and of our ongoing cultural, national and territorial disputes with one another.

The vision of Revelation is the unparalleled and final vision of a world made one by the love of Christ. It is a world that is in unity with God and with one another. It is a vision of the world where war and division, suffering and tears no longer exist because humanity is in unity with one another and with God. It is a world of not only peace, but of justice, where the thirsty will have the water of life, and where the hungry will be fed with good things.

Obviously, we have not arrived at the new heaven and the new earth. We continue to live in a world of disputed borders and wars. We continue to live in a world that lives in fear of the Other and with hatred for those whose ethnicity, gender and identity are seen as different. We continue to live in a world that practices philanthropy for some, but not agape love for all. To love as Jesus loves means loving without borders, without discrimination, without hatred and injustice.

This is what we are to be about as a church. In a badly divided world, we are to offer a glimpse of God's kingdom. We are to reach out to the margins as a church welcoming all unconditionally; the church is to be a place where sinners become saints, where the hungry are fed, the stranger welcomed, and the sick and the prisoner visited.

The world knows Jesus not by the history of the church, not by its theology, and not by its splendorous buildings. The world knows Jesus by our love for one another. We are called by Jesus to give our lives, our time, talents and treasures – all that we have – for others, so that the world will know Jesus.

Love one another so that everyone – the world – will know Jesus.

Jesus' command to love is always new each moment that we sacrifice ourselves for others, as Jesus has done for us. The love of Jesus is not an idea; it must be acted upon to exist.

Through you, the love of Jesus will change the world.

Love one another. Amen.