

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 21, 2017



Ascension Lutheran Church
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This Is No Ordinary Love

John 14:15-21

Here we are on the 6th Sunday of Easter and we are still celebrating the resurrection of our Lord. We are still proclaiming with Christians all over the world, “Christ has risen! He is risen, indeed. Hallelujah!” “Christ has risen! He is risen, indeed. Hallelujah!” But what’s happening with our gospel text today? Today we encounter our Savior with his disciples on the eve of his *crucifixion*. How did we get back to Maundy Thursday? In today’s gospel lesson, we witness part of Jesus’s farewell speech to the disciples. In John’s gospel we find ourselves with the Jesus and his disciples in the Upper Room. Jesus is well aware that his hour has come however the disciples, true to form, are confused. But who came blame them? I don’t think I can overstate that because Jesus was well aware that these were the last hours before he would face a violent death, the events of this evening become all the more important. Think about it. If you knew that you had one day to live, how would you spend those final hours? What would you say? Who would you see? What would you do? Let’s bring these questions to John’s gospel, shall we?

So today we find ourselves at the Last Supper. Our savior is staring down death and not just any death—the brutality of the cross. And what does Jesus stress to his disciples? LOVE. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.” That evening, Jesus also told his disciples that he would give them a new commandment. “Love one another as I have loved you.”

At first glance, this passages seems quite simple, almost trite – Christians should love each other. Christians should love Jesus and keep his commandments. But if we take a moment to put these verses into the larger context of Maundy Thursday, we see that complexities actually abound. Since Jesus knows that these are his last few hours before the cross, everything he says and does on this night carries even greater significance. So perhaps this Sunday we are to pause from our stories about Jesus’ actions after the resurrection and remember our foundational call to love. After all, it is how the world will recognize us.

Please understand this love that Jesus calls us to is beyond warm fuzzy feelings. Yes, that may be a small part of it. But let me tell you, if you wait for some feeling to rush over you, be forewarned that the feeling may not be there when you really need it. Walking with God is wonderful! Walking with some of God’s people well....That takes some Jesus love. But this Jesus love is living, it’s moving. It is dynamic and it calls to us and empowers us to action. This Jesus love is a verb. Jesus told his disciples, “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 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.” God’s word teaches us that God’s commandments are not burdensome. Jesus told his disciples that we should love one another because it will give us complete JOY! Isn’t it amazing? Our Savior, on the night before the cross, took the time to gather his disciples under his wings like a mother hen and then Jesus called them friends and said to love one another as I have loved you.

Jesus's words, spoken at the Last Supper on the night before his death hold a special promise for his followers. Jesus promised his disciples and us to be with us that he would be present everywhere and in all times, through the Advocate that he would send. This Advocate will lead and guide. It is the Spirit of Truth. It is the Holy Spirit. And through the Holy Spirit, we are invited to an extraordinary level of intimacy. We abide in Jesus and Jesus abides in us and that is Good News. Through the Holy Spirit we can experience a love like no other. John's gospel teaches us "Jesus loved them to the end." You know, Martin Luther once said, "When you read in the gospel or hear it read that Jesus Christ comes here or goes there, that he heals the sick and raises the dead and forgives sins, you are to understand that [Jesus] is coming here, that [Jesus] is forgiving you and raising you from the dead, and healing you." So when we hear the words "Jesus loved them to the end," we know that Christ's love extends to us. Sisters and brothers, yes Jesus was nailed to the cross. But make no mistake. The nails did not hold him there. It was love that kept Jesus on that cross. It was his love for you. It was his love for me. It was his love for all of humanity, even all of creation that kept Jesus on the cross. So whether we are obedient or obstinate, whether we are dutiful or doubtful, whether we are clean or clandestine, whether we are serving or selfish, whether we are righteous or just wrong, Jesus' loves us to the end. Jesus loves us to the end and Jesus loves us greatly.

Sisters and brothers, at the Last Supper, Jesus stresses love. This is no ordinary love because Jesus gives us this commandment moments after Judas goes out to betray him and shortly before Peter denies him and Jesus is fully aware that both events are going to take place. And what does he tell his disciples? Does he say, "Look kids, it's a rough world out there. People are going to betray you so don't let anyone get too close to you. Make sure you look out for numero uno!" And that's the thing. This world is rough. Jesus was about to be publically

executed. But what does Jesus command in the midst of violent injustice? Jesus says, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” This love that Jesus calls us to is powerfully counter-cultural. I’m sure that when Jesus said “Love one another” that he meant love Judas, too. And that’s challenging. But this powerful love that Jesus commands is living, moving. It is dynamic and it calls us to action.

This powerful love is more than counter cultural. It is counter intuitive, but at the same time it is life-giving and life affirming. Jesus’ is transformative! His love testifies. It speaks to God’s grace. It speaks to God’s forgiveness. Jesus’ powerful love calls to the brokenhearted and gives a word of comfort. This Jesus-love calls to the anxious among us who long for peace. This Jesus-love calls to each of us and beckons us to a different kind of spiritual maturity. And we need it now more than ever. Our families need it. This congregation needs it. Our divisive, violent society needs it. All of Christianity needs it. But not for our sake, for the sake of the world. Jesus calls us to walk in this his powerful love. The love that Jesus calls us to is a way of life. This love does not crumble when it gets offended. The love that Jesus calls us to is too powerful for that. This Jesus-love keeps no record of wrongs – holding grudges and walking in unforgiveness. The love that Jesus calls us to is too powerful for that. This Jesus-love is not judgmental it is kind and patient. And that is precisely what makes it so powerful. It is challenging to live it out yet it is impossible to conquer it. Why? Because Jesus died for it. And then Jesus went to hell for it. And then Jesus defeated death and the grave. And Christ is risen. He is risen indeed! Hallelujah! And the risen Christ gives us the power to practice powerful love in a challenging world. Let the church say, AMEN!