



Sunday May 9, 2021  
John 15:9-17 (Sixth Sunday of Easter)

Pastor Tony Acompanado

***Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!***

There was a man who wanted to tell his wife about how much he loved her, so he began speaking to her in long, eloquent, and flowery sentences going on and on about all the ways he cherished her. He even went so far as to tell her that he loved her so much that he would die for her. *“That won’t be necessary,”* she responded, unimpressed, *“if you want to tell me you love me, then how about you empty the dishwasher like you promised you would three days ago.”*

Love is an important part of our daily lives. But sometimes it’s difficult to make sense of because we have so many different understandings of the word. We use phrases like, *“My dog loves those treats,”* or *“I loved that Netflix series,”* or *“I just love that color on you.”* So when we repetitively use love in such a flippant manner then we essentially dilute it into something far less meaningful and it tends to lose its significance in our lives.

I would guess that most of you have heard the saying, *“The answer is as plain as the nose on your face.”* Your nose is obvious to everyone else, but it’s incredibly difficult for you to see it. And sometimes the answer to a complex issue is plain to everyone else, but you can’t see it because you’re just too close to it. What about the saying, *“You can’t see the forest for the trees?”* Sometimes the trees are right in front of you, but you forget they are part of the forest.

Anyone who knows me knows that I like things to be concise, straightforward, and uncomplicated. It’s not that I don’t appreciate the complexities of various things – I do, but I just think there are many things in life that we complicate far more than necessary. For whatever reason we seem to find the simple too simple...almost complicated. So, what do we do – we complicate it to make it simpler to understand.

In the spiritual disciplines study that I’m leading, last week we talked about the discipline of simplicity. And while this practice reminds us that we’re called to live a more simplified lifestyle, I was particularly struck how clearly this concept spoke to me in this week’s Gospel.

And I hate to admit this, but sometimes I think we preachers are guilty of trying to make the story of God’s love for us sound more impressive and more beautiful, when all that’s needed from us is to proclaim how inclusive, accessible, and filled with grace it is.

After reading this week’s Gospel text with that in mind, I found myself amazed at how simple Jesus’ message for us today really is. And if we allow it to be what it is, then the answer to a seemingly complex idea can truly be simpler than we realize.

As strange as it may seem on this sixth Sunday of the Easter season, today’s gospel places us with Jesus as he nears the end of his earthly ministry. His disciples have been with him for three years. They have seen Jesus cast out demons, heal the sick, give sight to the blind and enable the lame to walk. They have been with Jesus when he stilled the storm and fed five thousand people. Jesus has taught them many things about God, life, the world, and themselves. And now, here in this scene in John’s gospel Jesus sums up his ministry and his teaching – all of it captured in eight simple words, *“love one another as I have loved you.”*

I guess we shouldn’t be too surprised though by Jesus’ synopsis. Love and the lack of love are powerful forces in our lives. Songs, poems, and books are written about love. A great majority of movies and tv programs are about love. Deep within ourselves we crave love and realize that it’s vital to our existence. And most of us also realize that we cannot have a full life unless we love others as well.

We also know how fragile love is – how easily it can be ruined by hate, prejudice, self-interest, being judgmental, and lacking forgiveness. And there are certainly times when it’s difficult if not almost impossible to love, because we have been hurt so deeply. And yet, amid all our struggles with love, Jesus not only reminds us of its importance, but he also instructs us on how to be centered in love.

The first key that enables us to be centered in love is found in verse sixteen when Jesus says, *“You did not choose me, but I chose you.”* We are chosen. I think it’s safe to assume that all of us at some point in our lives have experienced the heartbreak of not being chosen. We might not have been picked to be on a team or part of a group. Perhaps we got passed over for a promotion or got turned down for a job that we applied for. We know how devastating this can be. For some people it’s an experience that leaves an unforgettable mark on their lives. And yet, at the same time, we also know the deep excitement of being chosen.

Our experience with love begins with our being *chosen by God*. This action by God is highlighted in the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. We come to the waters of Baptism and proclaim that in those waters God has claimed us as his own and has brought us into his family. In Holy Communion we are reminded of the depth of God’s



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love for us through bread and wine and the powerful words – *given for you and shed for you*. The ultimate mystery is that God's motivation is simply a result of God's unwavering love for us. We can't explain it. We don't know why. All we can say is that God has taken the initiative and has loved us and chosen us. And because of this, we are forever different and forever blessed.

In verses nine and ten Jesus calls his disciples to "*abide*" in his love. The word literally means to "*pitch your tent*." We are invited to enter into God's love and take up residence in that love. This dynamic of abiding or remaining in God's love is difficult to explain, but we've all experienced it in some form in our daily lives. The love and support of parents that allows a five-year-old to step on to the bus on the first day of school. The love of spouses, family and friends that enables us to face the challenges of the day. And even when we are separated by thousands of miles, on business trips or fighting a war, the love of others is a part of our lives. Love keeps us going. And God's love works in our lives in the same way.

When we dwell in God's love, we have peace and contentment. We sense God's hand upon us and see God's movement in our lives. In the midst of grief and tragedy we sense God's care and comfort. When we face overwhelming challenges or when life comes crashing down around us it's God's love that gives us the strength and determination to persevere.

But when we question God's love for us, peace and contentment evaporate. When we have difficulty recognizing God's loving presence in our times of grief and struggles we begin to slip into despair and hopelessness. And while our situations may not change, our lives are transformed when we rediscover God's love for us and once again abide in that love.

Jesus tells his disciples about his love and their being chosen so that their joy may be complete. Remaining in God's love – living each day of our lives in the reality of God's love brings peace, satisfaction, and joy into our lives. And sharing our love with others allows us to experience a greater and deeper joy in our lives.

Jesus tells his disciples that he has chosen them so that they will bear fruit – good fruit. That fruit is produced from love – love that inspires and motivates us to use our talents and abilities and our treasures in service to others. Loving others, sharing the good news of Jesus with them in both word and deed, and recognizing how it changes lives brings with it great joy.

In verse thirteen, Jesus tells his disciples that there is no greater love than giving one's life up for friends. Of course, he's revealing what will soon take place in his own life. He is also telling us that an essential part of life is giving up our lives for others – rather than for ourselves. And while the reality may be that we aren't physically dying for others, we may however give up our dreams, goals, lifestyles, time, and our treasures for one another. My friends, we don't have to complicate our life of faith and certainly not God's love for us. The heart of today's Gospel message is really very simple, and Jesus offers us a straightforward formula – God the Father loves Jesus the Son, Jesus the Son loves us, and we are called to love one another. Don't complicate it. Don't try to find a hidden meaning. It really is this simple. The bottom line is, we can love because God first loved us. God first loved us in Jesus, so let us do as Jesus commands, but not out of obligation, rather, so that the joy of which Jesus speaks may be in us and that our joy may be complete. So, let's make this simple – love one another as Jesus has loved us. Thanks be to God. Amen.