



## What Love Looks Like

Fourth Sunday of Easter  
15 May 2022

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Rev. Christian W. Marien

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

A couple of weeks ago, my wife and I took the 4-year-old golden retriever on a walk. Our subdivision is not far from the Fox River and because of the schedules that day we did not get outside to walk until around 5:00pm. We walked through the neighborhood and down to the park and hit the trail that follows the river. Baxter is always 15 feet in front of us. We made the turn on the path that took us directly next to the river and we saw a small herd of deer. Baxter kept walking, I kept walking, my wife kept walking and the deer moved a little farther away from us as we got a little closer to them. The herd moved up a small hill and we kept walking until we noticed one of the deer turn his head and focus on the three of us. Baxter kept walking, I kept walking – my wife said, “Christian.” Which I know means that she wants me to pay attention – that she is about to say something serious. But Baxter was not concerned, I was not concerned. But my wife – well she was concerned...especially as the deer who had kept his focus on us now turned so that his entire body was facing us. My wife stopped walking – “Christian” she said again. Don’t worry about it - they will run when we get closer – but as I said this, I looked up at the deer who was now beginning to walk toward us. My wife again said, “Christian.” And this time I paid more attention – as the deer began to move his head back and forth and pick up speed as he came toward us. Unsure if I wanted to challenge the deer – I thought to myself – no big deal – Baxter – our fearless dog will bark and protect me. But imagine my surprise as I turned to look at my wife behind me – Ileen had already taken off running back up the trail and who do you think was five feet in front of my wife – none other than our brave golden retriever Baxter who wanted no part of the deer that was continuing to come at us. Some dog. Some wife. Where was the love? I was on my own.

It is easy to feel that way – often in this life. Of course - there are times when we are truly alone. Other times – when we simply do not ask for help. And still other times when the people who love us are present with us but are unsure of how to help us. And then there is Jesus.

“I give you a new commandment,” says Jesus, “that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” It sounds good Jesus. Really good. Yet, it is easier said than done. There are days when it is easier to love your neighbor or your co-worker than it is to love your spouse or sibling. Why is that? How do we find ourselves in moments where it is easier to love someone we barely know instead of the one we have known intimately?

We are in the great season of Easter, but today we hear Jesus speak these words while he sits at dinner in the upper room with the disciples the night before he is crucified. Why return us to this moment? Should we not be celebrating the joy of resurrection power and the promise of eternal life while instead we are hearing Jesus remind us again to “love one another.” I often say that the sermon you hear is the sermon I needed to preach to myself. And hearing Jesus speak these words to us today reminds me that Jesus also needed to hear the words he was preaching that night over bread and wine. Remember who was at the table. 12 disciples gathered with Jesus that night – among them was Peter – the one who would deny Jesus three times before Jesus was led to the cross; Judas, the one who would betray him to religious leaders; and John – the one who is often described in the Bible as “the one whom Jesus loved.” Do you wonder how Jesus felt that night – reminding his disciples to love one another while he already knew one was about to betray him and one would deny him and nine of the last ten would desert him as he was arrested. Only John would stay by his side all the way to the cross. Is it possible that Jesus needed to remind himself of the commandment to love one another as he reminded the disciples of the same?

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said once that story of the church is like a great extended family that receives a tremendous bequest: they receive an inheritance of a wonderful, beautiful, spacious, luxurious home to share. There is only one stipulation. All must live in it together. I have a great love for the church and all of her



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struggles. I also have great love for God's people and all of our struggles. It is how I learn to love in greater ways. So often by the examples you offer to me. Lord knows I have had moments when I have been taught what not to do, but those moments pale in comparison to so many examples where you live out Jesus' command to love one another. A member of our church entered hospice a couple of days ago. After not feeling good for a while, she went to the doctor only to find out that she had cancer. Her mother had died a few years ago, and I knew that she had no other living relatives. Just a few friends and some members of Ascension who had become friends when she began worshipping with us. A few days later, I found out that she decided to pass on her doctor's treatment plan and return home and live out the days she had left. I visited her in the ICU a few days before she was able to move home. I shared with her my sadness about her decision to not enter into treatment for her cancer. I shared with her that I respected her decision even as I did not like it. She thanked me for respecting her decision. And then, we shared communion. When I had given her the blessing, she reached out to hold my hand. I sat across from her and held her hand. She was completely wrapped in blankets, with only her hand and head visible. She had been smiling at me the entire visit, but after the blessing, she focused her eyes on me and said, "pastor, I want to thank you for coming." And I started to interrupt her and she squeezed my hand and stopped talking. She continued, "you and the people at Ascension have been very good to me." At this point I can only smile and hold her hand tighter. And then she told me, "you and my friends at Ascension have shown me so much love. I just wanted you to know that."

What does "love one another" look like?

It looks like taking care of the ones who have no one else to take care of them.

It looks like reaching out to the difficult people in your life.

It looks like patience with others and yourself.

It looks like humility even when you know you are right.

It looks like courage when you want to run.

It looks like respect even when you are disrespected.

It looks like honesty when you know the truth.

It looks like persistence even when you are tired.

It looks like sacrifice for the good of another.

It looks like showing up when others walk away.

"I give you a new commandment," says Jesus, "that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Today, we welcome Lilian Hope and Callan Joseph into the family. We make more space in the house. We add another seat to the table. We promise to pray for them – teach them – bless them – forgive them – honor their gifts – celebrate their accomplishments – instruct them when they lose their way. Most importantly, we promise to love them. We will excel. We will fail. We will start again. This is what it means to love one another. Today in the gift of Lilian/Callan we are reminded that Jesus does exactly the same for us. Thanks be to God. Amen.