

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Sixth Sunday of Easter: May 9, 2021 Mother's Day

“Jesus' Kind of Love”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good Morning and Happy Mother's Day to all. Please know that I extend that to fur mommies, and also those whose nurturing of children doesn't fit into the normal categories. So for today our theme of love continues with our Gospel, and how appropriate for Mother's Day.

Our Gospel this morning has Jesus describing God's love for us: his creation, and Jesus' love for us, which was so great he “laid down his life.” I want to talk about a few things that I feel often get mixed up in the message that Jesus gives us about love.

Jesus tells us his commandment is that we love one another as he has loved us. I want to make it clear that this is a very different statement than love your neighbor as yourself which is what we often say. Jesus is also saying, if you are unsure about how God's feels about your existence, look at my examples. So, let's begin with looking at the way Jesus loves us.

We can begin with Jesus' baptism which models repentance and acceptance of God's calling to each and every one of us to have an intimate relationship with God. A relationship that is so strong, just as Jesus was able to resist the devil and all its' temptations, that we too can possess the strength and wisdom to say no to the things that call us into wrong ways; like the love of power and greed, including trying to bargain with God for our own selfish will.

Jesus on the mount reminds us that everyone has worth in the eyes of God. The meek are blessed, those who mourn are comforted, the hungry and thirsty for righteousness

and justice are seen, all with the reminder that following God's commandments may bring strife to your human lifetime; as it butts up against social norms, all the while, adding to your heavenly comfort.

He tells us not to worry about what we eat or drink or what we wear because in God's sight we have value beyond whatever judgements others may have about us because of what we have or don't have. And God will provide the essentials even if it is through the charity of others. He reminds us to be aware of false prophets - those who would lead us astray, away from God, away from acting in love with compassion.

Jesus shows us the healing power of God by healing those around him, but also warns this is not the path for everyone, but rather a confirming event of the power Jesus holds to use in service to glorify God in a way that allows people to see the power of God's love.

Jesus gives authorization to any who believe in his name to continue his healing ministry to those who welcome his message. He gives pardon to the prostitute, he doesn't judge the woman at the well, he accepts the perfume anointing before death from a woman.

Jesus welcomes the children and those who are widowed, and models social justice. He rebukes those who would make God's worship place a marketplace. He gives his life with no reservations, for the salvation of others. This is Jesus' kind of love.

Now the other part of this equation seems to be "love my neighbor as myself." I want to be clear that when referring to the myself here, hopefully we are referring to our most highest version of ourselves. Don't forget our own ability to move to a higher level of being. And although as a part of human nature there are some of us who often underestimate ourselves, are too critical of our choices, are struggling with the past, or just are simply not happy for whatever reason. We are still called to love.

While all of our foibles are valid and understandable, we are allowed to be anyway we want. I have found a strange correlation to how we love ourselves and our ability to love others, to be forever tied.

We can carry the baggage of familiar stories of not receiving love and then having difficulty showing love to others, feeling more responsible for something negative in our lives, than we really are. We often have physical judgements about our bodies not being enough of something, too young, too old, too big, too small etc. and all of this affects how we love each other. It takes that joy, that Jesus talks about, away.

Changing social norms are making us more aware of where our biases come from, we are learning about hidden histories and cultures, we are in a constant digital informational update. And this affects how we love our neighbors. We can't believe everything we see on social media, not everyone is having a perfect life, nor is everyone out to get us.

Jesus is modeling God's view and opinion of us right to our face. There is no judgement; and where there is wrong, there is forgiveness. There is acceptance and a recognizing of worth. There is the care and nurturing of the soul like a mother.

I doubt anyone of us, myself included, could ever get to a point where I could actually meet the mark of loving everyone I meet as Jesus would. Yes, it's a high mark. But it is a mark. It is an example of the greatness that lies sleeping in all of us.

Next time you find yourself making judgments or struggling with a decision about how to treat someone, try that old 1980's saying, "What would Jesus do?" It is not such a bad question to ask. You may want to begin with the question "do you know you are truly loved by God?" for this will influence how you love others.

Are you loving yourself lately? Are you taking breaks from stress, are you working on your health? Are you forgiving yourself when bad memories come up? Are you as accepting of yourself as Jesus would be to you? Because that's where this love thing begins. The Jesus' kind of love.

“Abide in my love” Jesus says, “so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”

Remember that childhood song, “Jesus loves me this I know?” Well this is where in the Bible it tells you so. If Jesus loves you, who are you to question whether or not you are lovable just the way you are? That also applies to your neighbor. Jesus loves them too, with no exception, no matter what you think.

Everyone has hurts (trust me on that one); everyone has reason to not be loving to themselves or someone else. But we are called to forgive ourself, accept God's forgiveness, and to grow from our experiences, even if it takes a therapist. We need to love ourselves, because it makes loving someone else so much easier.

We are after all God's children, each and everyone of us. And as the letter from John explains, God's commandments are not meant to be burdensome. To love someone is to find joy in their existence, even if that is just to acknowledge they are here in your life for some reason. And yes, just as I said last week, you can love without liking, just like you can forgive without forgetting.

On this most lovely Mother's Day, I leave you with one of the Beatles most famously penned phrases:

"In the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make." Amen