

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Fifth Sunday of Easter: May 2, 2021

“Love as Caring”

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Good morning! I want to thank everyone involved in the plant sale. I love my little tree and it's looking good this morning. Today I have put together a reflection with quotes and thoughts from various theologians. We are exploring the Epistle from the First Book of John.

The writer of 1 John is concerned with his community experiencing a true communion with God through love and fellowship. Throughout the Epistle he gives various so called “tests” to ponder on one's relationship with God. Our reading today focuses on God as love. During the writing of this letter, God as love was as new a concept as 5G is for us today.

When you think about it, the word “love” is, for us, a generic term that conjures up a variety of meanings and connotations. It can refer to a feeling so powerful it causes us to do crazy things, and it can just as easily refer to a devotion to an individual or group that demands loyalty, fidelity, commitment and sacrifice. Love can be as fickle as a passing whim – as in, “I just love Starbuck's new Caramel Frappuccino” – or, it can be as enduring as life itself – as in, “Love divine, all love excelling.”

So where does love come from? Our readings today point clearly to God, the creator of everything. If we really believe what we pray, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow” we would clearly understand this. But, being the faulted creatures that we are, we think we are in control of everything, and the creator of

our own gifts. The world is trying constantly to sell us something that will make us love ourselves better, or make someone else love us more. Love is often looked at as a commodity.

And so, contrary to what the world would have us believe, the source of love **is not within us**; but is - within the very being of God, for “God is love, and he who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him.” (1 John 4:16)

James Thurber once wrote, “My pet peeve is the bright detergent voice of the average American singer, male or female, yelling or crooning in cheap yammer songs about love. Americans are brought up without being able to tell love from sex, lust, Snow White or Ever After. We think of it as a push-button solution, or instant cure for discontent and a sure road to happiness, whatever it is.” He goes on to say, “It is nothing of the kind. A lady of forty-seven who has been married twenty- years and has six children knows what love is and once described it for me like this: ‘Love is what you have been through with somebody.’”

What you have been through with somebody. Simply stated, it’s about caring. Care. Simple selfless care. That is what your God is all about, that is what he supremely is. God is love, this selfless care kind of love. The creator and ruler of the universe cares about us. Enough so that he can make things right even after we have created a disaster of wrongs. Love strong enough to grant us our free will, and then mop up the mess.

The Greeks would have thought this concept of God as love was crazy. Everybody knew that God is supreme, a master intelligence, a cosmic genius, a philosopher’s mind like Plato. “God thinks,” the Hellenist would say. This is who our Epistle writer is addressing.

The new Christians were challenging this Greek concept of God the thinker, and as for the Hebrew people with a God of judgment and punishment, here was a clear “No,” said by a Jewish young man out of Nazareth. Jesus’ teachings repeatedly tell us God cares, cares for the sparrows and the lilies of the field, cares for the lame and the leper, the blind and the lost. He also cares and loves you, every one of you. He cares indiscriminately for all of us.

And to make his point indelible and unmistakable Jesus took his love and care for his people, his friends and enemies, even to the point of death on a cross so we would know the message of love clear, clean and true. If God is in the thinking business, to get close to him you would need to go to the monastery or university and think. Yet even little children experience the love of God. If God is in the caring business, to get close to him ... well, you go where someone needs caring for, and this is the original calling of the church, and remains our calling today.

This is not to say that care is without intelligence. Love does not mean submitting to the will of others. Real care for the other does not mean always doing what they want. It means wise action or even inaction on the basis of what you think is truly best for them. It means to truly care about what is good and creates growth. This applies to those we love, and also to God; when prayers go unanswered, or we are in the midst of struggle.

Margaret Hillis, the late director of the Chicago Symphony Choir, told the story of how when she was a child playing by a pond near her home, she fell into the water that was over her head. She remembers thinking that she must swim, and she did. Crawling up onto solid ground, she already began worrying about what her punishment would be, she knew she hadn’t been paying attention and she could see her father sitting on the opposite bank.

He had made no move to rescue her, just as he made no move now either to congratulate her on being safe or take her to task. “There was a strange comfort in it,” she says. “He had let me learn to depend on myself—yet he was there if I needed him.” To truly care is to do not the easy thing, the applauded thing, the wished thing, but the wise thing, the right thing. This is how God works in our lives.

Love is, therefore, not always soft or indulgent. It can mean gentle acceptance of the fallen. But it can mean driving the money changers out of the temple court. It all depends upon a judgment as to what is truly needed, what truly makes for health and life through the lens of love. This is God’s very being.

And this is not to say that caring or loving always means liking. C.S. Lewis once said, “Thank God he did not command me to like everybody.” I may find my children, or my friend, or the colleague, or the stranger on the way distinctly unlikeable, on certain days given my own tastes and ways. But even if I am turned off by someone, I can still care for him or her as a fellow human being.” In fact, one of the realities we need to face and remember, is that the person who needs our love and care the most may be the one who is not particularly likable at the moment.

God is love, the root, the center, the anchor. Jesus shows us how God loves through his care for us and his creation; he is the vine, his life the way. We are the branches - those that have experienced God’s love and care in our lives. Let us continue to strive to love more perfectly, and wisely care more selflessly, always asking through the wisdom, love and power of Jesus Christ. Amen