

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Sixth Sunday of Easter: May 14, 2023

“Mother’s Day”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning and welcome to the Sixth Sunday of Easter, and Happy Mother’s Day. I will be speaking to both today, so please bear with me.

As Jesus refers to keeping his commandments, the reference to love one another as I have loved you, is after all the summation of the law. We also have to take into account that this Gospel, the Gospel of John, the author is also referred to as the unnamed character called “the beloved disciple.” So I think today’s message here is love.

When doing a scholarly search Jesus uses the love verbs *agapao*, and *phileo* fifty-seven times in this Gospel. Not to mention all the occurrences of “friend”. It is easy to see that the condensing of the Ten Commandments into love is clear from Jesus’ declaration:

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.

It’s worth noting that love is tied to this Gospel’s realized eschatology, or what some call the “what happens after you die

theology.” Jesus gives one commandment: to love. Therefore, the Gospel of John presents the idea that judgment and eternal life begin now, and this is good news.

At the end of each day, and during each moment of each day, for John, there’s only one question to ask yourself: “In what ways did I, or did I not love today?”

As you reflect upon that statement of whether you have loved, or not- judgment happens, and it starts with you. When you did not love, there lies a judgment. But understand that for John judgment is merely diagnostic, not retributive. This is the beginning of wondering what you could do better, and what will you do next time.

At the heart of most of the conversations Jesus has with his disciples he is constantly asking questions that try to help them understand their lives and motives more clearly. This is called living a reflective life.

When we are children we are told practice makes perfect, and this is true for love, and through living a more reflective life, you allow a chance to practice more love. There is not one person in this room that has not got something important on their mind in some way, and that kind of levels the playing field, when you realize you want to treat others well, because they, like you, have things to deal with.

Today is Mother's Day and for most preachers a difficult one to tackle for these reasons. For some this is a family day, for others a day of grief and bereavement. For some it will be a day to celebrate or ignore, and the lists of positive vs negative could go on. But for sure, including Jesus, everyone of us has a mother.

And if you are a mother, in whatever form that takes, if you are nurturing a living thing, I guarantee you have made mistakes, but you also have done things beyond perfect. The issue isn't the right or wrong of it, but rather the intention of nurturing through love. I have seen some of the worse situations when viewed openly through the lens of love and grace create amazing people.

In the reflective life, when we look over our day, maybe today is the day we love our mothers, and ourselves, no matter what.

I have been counseling at a nursing home to people who are struggling. I met with a patient a few weeks ago that had lost several finger tips, and a leg from the knee down. He had a past history of not taking care of himself well. The story from the staff was that he could be a tough cookie to deal with, and seemed very unhappy.

We sat and talked about some of his background, which to say the least was a bit rough, and I began to explain that since he often found himself up at night staring at the ceiling, he could start on a

reflection process so he could let go of some of his anger and sadness. He was intrigued and asked me if I could give him an example and so this is what I told him, a purely fictional story.

“Let’s say you’re five years old and you’re hungry. Your mother works, gets busy, has to take care of your sister, and somehow you never got dinner. So you go to bed angry, you’re upset, what is happening **is** happening to you, and you try to figure out what you did to make this happen, and maybe you end up angry at your mother, and then upset with yourself.”

I go on with my made up story, “so this stays in the back of your mind. But that day for your mother, she was having a really hard day, an adult day that you can’t understand after all you are only five. So both of you are hurt.”

By now I have my patient’s attention, so I conclude my example: “why not let it go, or forgive it if needed. You were five, no five year old can take care of dinner, or direct their parents, your mother was trying her best, but you will never know all the factors. You could hang onto the non loving feelings and the negative stuff, or you could let it go, and for a moment love her for trying, and love yourself for surviving.”

I finished my story, which was for me a made up tale, to find a teary man who then explained he had been that five year old many times,

but he had never looked at it from an adult perspective, or at least an outsider view. He had never reflected on how the hurt and love were happening all at the same time.

He stated he had some things he wanted to reflect and process. We now meet regularly to review his reflections, and his attitude has certainly changed per the staff.

So wherever you are today on your Mother's Day journey,
I leave you this day with an excerpt from Mary Oliver:

My work is in loving the world...

Are my boots old? Is my coat torn?

Am I no longer young and still not half-perfect?

Let me keep my mind on what matters,

which is my work, (to love the world)

which is mostly standing still and learning to be

astonished.

Happy Mother's Day! Amen