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May 6, 2018

Easter 6: John 15. 9-17

Love like Jesus loves

“This is my commandment,” Jesus says, “that you love one another as I have loved you.”¹

It certainly sounds simple enough – love like Jesus loves.

But this morning I want us to pause right there, to spend some time thinking about what that statement really means. In this commandment to love as Jesus loves, something big is going on: we are invited into the heart of God, into the core of the universe and the created order, into the very soul of our existence.

Many of you heard me preach on love before – Trinity Sunday - heard me talk about how, when we see love in the world, that what we are seeing is a glimpse of God, an image of the divine. That when we love, we are participating in who God is. And all of this made possible by Jesus, and explained, right here, in John’s gospel for us.

Love one another as I have loved you.

Love one another with the divine love with which I have loved you. The love which originates in God, originates in the Father. The first verse of our Gospel passage today makes that clear: “As the Father has loved me,” Jesus says, “so I have loved you.”²

This is the perfect love, the love within God; the love of the Father for the Son; the love which, in the very beginning, could not be contained and burst forth into what we call creation; the love that the Son now invites us into: “Abide in *my* love.”³

Jesus invites us, you and me, to share in the love of the Trinity, the purest love. We are invited to share in this love, his joy.

This is the invitation. Well...if only it was an invitation.

¹ John 15.12

² John 15.9a

³ John 15.9b

Because if we read closely we see that it's actually a commandment, an imperative – “you are my friends if you do what I *command* you.”⁴ That is, you are my friends *if* you love one another as I have loved you, as the Father has loved me.

To be a friend of Jesus, it turns out, I need to be obedient to God's commandments, to love others.

But obedience sounds kind of ominous, don't you think, like a master-slave arrangement. God gives the orders and we obey blindly. You command, I follow. What kind of friendship is that? What does obedience mean between friends?

I suggest to you that to follow God's commandment, to obey divine law, to be friends with Jesus, is first and foremost to be in relationship. Divine commandments are always about relationship. Think back to the Old Testament. God's relationship with the Israelites took the form of commandments. When Moses walked down the mountain carrying the two stone tablets, he was carrying instructions for how the Israelite nation would continue in relationship with their God.

In the New Testament, being in relationship with the Father was a hallmark of Jesus' earthly ministry. Particularly in John's gospel, Jesus constantly refers to his relationship with God the Father: “I have come in my Father's name” (John 5.43), “I speak these things as the Father instructed me” (John 8.27), “All that the Father has is mine” (John 16.15), “The Father and I are one” (John 10.30).

Jesus obeyed the commandments given him by God the Father, and we can likewise be in relationship with Jesus, may abide in his love, be his friends, if we keep his commandments, if we stay in relationship with him.⁵

Furthermore, relationship is about trust. Trust and love, together, makes friendship. Obedience to God, then, is to trust in him. To live in faith! In his relationship with the Israelites, God sought their trust through the commandments he gave Moses. In Jesus, we see the perfect example of trust and love, the perfect relationship between man and God.

⁴ John 15.14

⁵ The concept of relationship as love and obedience is developed by William Temple, *Readings in St. John's Gospel – First and Second Series* (London: MacMillan & Co, 1959), 264.

We also know what ‘to love like God loves us’ looks like. Every time we repeat the Baptismal Covenant, like we did on Easter Day, we are making promises – we are striving to be obedient – to God’s will; we are endeavoring to love, as God loves us.

Will we continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship?

Will we persevere in resisting evil?

Will we proclaim the good news?

Will we seek and serve Christ in all persons?

Will we strive for justice and peace among all people?⁶

If we say yes to these things, we say yes to love, to loving like God loves us.

As I prepare to leave this community, I want to encourage you, St. Alban’s, to hold this commandment at the heart of your identity, as to who you are as a community. Let it underpin all that you do.

And never forget that you are, first and foremost, a community. This is Easter, after all: a fifty-day celebration of the risen Lord, the Body of Christ, the baptized community. Communities are built on relationships, on love and on trust. You are a community, members of the Body.⁷ No member more important than another in God’s eyes⁸, no member dispensable or unneeded.⁹ The body can only be the body if all the members assemble, work together, to continue Christ’s ministry of love for the world.

When we ground our actions in love, we are participating in God. Whether we appreciate that or not, is up to us. I appeal to you, St. Alban’s, to keep this knowledge always in your hearts and minds. Love one another, as God loves us, and the rest will follow. We serve, in whatever capacity – great or small, one hour or forty hours, prominent or behind the scenes – we serve because we love.

May this Eastertide be marked by joy, and may your joy be complete.¹⁰

⁶ Baptismal promises, BCP p.304-305.

⁷ Rom 12.4-5; 1Cor 12.27

⁸ 1Cor 12.21

⁹ 1Cor 12.23-25

¹⁰ John 15.11