



Sunday, May 1, 2020
Easter 6, Year A, 2020
The Rev. Deacon David Curtis

Blessed be God, who has not rejected my prayer, nor withheld God's love from me. Amen.

I came of age in the 80's which still seems like it was just 20 years ago. The time was marked by a resurgence of hope and faith in America. After the record interest rates, turmoil and malaise of the 70's, the economy took off and the stock market grew. Materialism was rampant. Gordon Gecko, in "Wall Street" uttered that infamous phrase: "Greed is good".

It was also a time of pandemic. It was the beginning of the AIDS epidemic. Thousands would die. And, what I remember most from that time is not love for the infected and dying, but fear and hatred, judgement and condemnation. I remember hearing good Christian people telling me and others that HIV and AIDS was God's punishment for sin. I don't remember a lot of love being preached in the 80's.

And, yet, love is at the heart of the Christian faith. We Christians don't have a lock on love, nor have we cornered the market on love. But Jesus is the one who told us to love and to love one another.

Today's Gospel reading is a bit out of place, it seems, for this Easter Season. It is part of Jesus's farewell address. Jesus has just finished the Last Supper, and Judas has fled into the night. Jesus has not been crucified, let alone been raised from the dead. Instead, Jesus is preparing his disciples for the road ahead. He is telling them, and us, that we are the ones that must continue to carry Jesus's teachings to others.

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Jesus did not say that if we love him, we would keep the 10 commandments or the other 603 commandments we find in the Hebrew Scriptures. Jesus is telling us that if we love him, we will keep his teachings. We will live out our faith in Jesus and be faithful to what he has taught us.

And what did Jesus teach? At its heart, we can find the answer in what Jesus said at the beginning of his farewell address: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."



Love. It's just that simple. And it's just that difficult. Think of the person who gets under your skin and think how hard it may be to love them? Knowing how difficult it is for us to love one another, Jesus tells us that he will send the Paraclete, the Advocate, to guide us and to remind of Jesus's teachings. The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, will abide with us and in us.

The Paraclete is with us still, guiding us, reminding us of Jesus's teachings, and empowering us to live into love. And the Paraclete is still here with us, as we learn to love people in new and different ways.

There are so many signs of the work of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, and the work of love these days. The church is learning how to be the church outside of the walls of the church, and for that, I give thanks and praise to God. Don't get me wrong: I miss gathering in community, in sacred space that has held the prayers of the faithful for decades and, in many cases, centuries. But, in this time when we are not in our buildings, many of us are learning that we are... you and me and the folks that sit next to us on any given Sunday... that we are the living, breathing, moving, loving, forgiving, and giving Bride of Christ. We are the Church. And the church is very much alive in this world. One of my favorite memes shows St. John's Church where I serve. And the meme reads: "Churches aren't empty. The church has been deployed." Each one of us has been called to active duty. We can no longer hide in the safety of our pews.

Scripture tells us that Jesus was driven into the wilderness by the Spirit, and, in a similar way, the Spirit has driven us into this wilderness of pandemic. Now, to make sure I am clear on this: I do not believe that God created this pandemic to punish anyone. But, I do believe that the Paraclete is sending us into the world to respond in love. To respond with food. To respond with masks. To respond with gifts of time and talent as we figure our virtual worship. To respond with and in love.

In the verses that precede our Gospel today, Jesus tells Philip that the words that Jesus speaks and the work that Jesus does are the works of the Father. Jesus also tells Philip and the other disciples that they will carry on Jesus's work. "Very truly, I tell you," Jesus says, "the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father." When we do the work of Jesus, we do God's work. When we love as Jesus loved, we love as God loves.

There is this cherished Christian hymn that many of us know whose chorus is "And they will know we are Christians by our love." Will they know that we are Christians by our love? Will they know you are a Christian by your love?

As the Spirit of Truth, the Paraclete, drives you back into the wilderness, may you take this blessing with you. It was written in 2015 by Brian Baker as his offering to the Burning Man Community.

The world now is too dangerous
And too beautiful
For anything but love.

Love is a blessing.
So may your eyes be so blessed that you see God in everyone
Your lips - so you speak nothing but the truth
Your ears - so that you hear the cry of the poor

May your hands be so blessed that everything you give and everything you receive
becomes a sacrament
Your feet - so that you run to those who need you
And may your heart be so opened
So set on fire
That your love
Your love
Changes everything.
Amen.