

6th Sunday of Easter Sermon

May 9, 2021

The Collect: O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Lessons: First Reading: Acts 10:44-48

Psalm 98

Second Reading: 1 John 5:1-6

Gospel: John 15:9-17

The Sermon: The Collect for today begins with a statement about God's actions towards us. It says that for those who love Him, He has prepared such good things, for us, that pass our understanding. It then asks that he pours this love into us, 1 John tells us that if we love God, we will obey his commandments. Jesus told his disciples if you abide in my love, you will keep my commandments.

What is the meaning of abide? The dictionary lists such terms as: To submit to, to put up with, to stand fast with, to remain.

Jesus is telling his disciples that he has stayed fast to loving his Father and he knows his Father loves him. If they keep Jesus' commandments, he will love them and they too will know the Father's love. Jesus then tells them to love one another as he has loved them.

What is love? Is it an affection for something?

In the times of the New Testament the Greeks used three words for love. The first is **eros**. This referred to erotic or sexual love. The second is **Philleo**. This refers to a tender affection towards a friend or family member. It refers to God's love for Jesus, God's love for an individual and Jesus' love for his disciples. My reference (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary) suggests that a person can never have this strong kind of love towards God. The suggestion is that we do not have the strength that this love requires.

The third word is **agapao, agape**. This is used to denote the special unconditional love that exists between God, Jesus and believers.

Again, what is love? In the movie Forest Gump, Forest says, "I may not be a smart man but I know what love is."

In the animal kingdom we can see love expressed as a mother fights to protect her offspring. When hunting in the wilds it is a rule that you not stand between or get too close to a mother and her offspring. If you do you will provoke an attack on yourself.

We can also see this emotion displayed in humans, parents will give their lives or place themselves at risk. to defend or protect their children

I think at this point I should say Happy Mother's Day to those who care for and love children. Now in this day, I also understand that men and others can also take on the role of mothering. So Happy Mother's Day to those who nurtures others.

While a young military man in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1970 or 71 I saw a wonderful expression of love and learned a valuable lesson.

I was in a restaurant, when a mother came in with two small children perhaps 5 and 7 years old. It was cold outside and the children had on hats and jackets that had seen better and cleaner days. The mother sat them at a table and she bought a large glazed pastry, a Honey Bun, and got two plates. She cut the pastry in half, put it on a plate and gave it to her children. She sat and watched them eat, but she ate nothing. As I watched, I wanted to get up and offer the mother money to buy each of them plus herself a Honey Bun and something to drink.

Tho I had the impulse of wanting to intervene, an even stronger impulse, perhaps the Holy Spirit said to me, "Stay out of it." The children not only enjoyed their Honey Bun, but they learned that their mother loved them and even if she could not afford to feed herself, she fed them.

My intrusion might have been an embarrassment for the mother. Sure, I could afford to give her money, but could I give her the respect and love her children would give her for that moment? The lesson, for me, is that empathy doesn't always call for intervention.

Another lesson I learned in Little Rock, Arkansas occurred just before I left the parish of Good Shepherd headed to Vietnam. While teaching a Sunday School class of 10-to-12-year old's, I was asked, "What is love?" I'll admit, I didn't know the answer, but I thought and this is what I told them. Love means that what I don't want you to do to me, I won't do to you. It also means I will treat you the way I want you to treat me."

Since 1970, I've used this definition to help me define love. I have also come to know that, for me and many others, love is the best feeling that exists. And you certainly miss it and it changes things when it is gone.

As I close, let me remind you that Jesus wants you to love others just like you love yourself. Amen

Rev. Lionel Starkes