

Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 9, 2021



Introduction

This Sunday's image of the life the risen Christ shares with us is the image of friendship. We are called to serve others as Jesus came to serve; but for John's gospel, the image of servanthood is too hierarchical, too distant, to capture the essence of life with Christ. Friendship captures the love, the joy, the deep mutuality of the relationship into which Christ invites us. The Greeks believed that true friends are willing to die for each other. This is the mutual love of Christian community commanded by Christ and enabled by the Spirit.

Thanksgiving for Baptism

You may want to have a small bowl of water available to remind you of your baptism!

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Refreshed by the resurrection life we share in Christ,
let us give thanks for the gift of baptism.

We thank you, risen Christ,
for these waters where you make us new,
leading us from death to life, from tears to joy.
We bless you, risen Christ,
that your Spirit comes to us
in the grace-filled waters of rebirth,
like rains to our thirsting earth,
like streams that revive our souls,
like cups of cool water shared with strangers.

Breathe your peace on your church when we hide in fear.
Clothe us with your mercy and forgiveness.
Send us companions on our journey as we share your life.
Make us one, risen Christ.
Cleanse our hearts. Shower us with life.
To you be given all praise, with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Gathering Hymn ELW # 863 / LBW # 524 *My God, How Wonderful Thou Art*

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

O God, you have prepared for those who love you joys beyond understanding. Pour into our hearts such love for you that, loving you above all things, we may obtain your promises, which exceed all we can desire; through Jesus Christ, your Son and our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Psalm: Psalm 98

¹Sing a new song to the LORD, who has done marvelous things,
whose right hand and holy arm have won the victory.

²**O LORD, you have made known your victory,
you have revealed your righteousness in the sight of the nations.**

³You remember your steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel;
all the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.

⁴**Shout with joy to the LORD, all you lands;
lift up your voice, rejoice, and sing.**

⁵Sing to the LORD with the harp, with the harp and the voice of song.

⁶**With trumpets and the sound of the horn
shout with joy before the king, the LORD.**

⁷Let the sea roar, and all that fills it, the world and those who dwell therein.

⁸**Let the rivers clap their hands,
and let the hills ring out with joy before the LORD,
who comes to judge the earth.**

⁹The LORD will judge the world with righteousness
and the peoples with equity.

Second Reading: 1 John 5:1-6

God's children believe that Jesus is the Messiah and love God by keeping God's commandments. Thus the world is conquered not through military might but through love and faith.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Gospel: John 15:9-17

On the night of his arrest, Jesus delivers a final testimony to his disciples to help them in the days ahead. Here, he repeats the most important of all his commands, that they love one another.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

People seem to be really frustrated, impatient, and angry with each other lately. About continued pandemic restrictions, the urgency of vaccinations, political beliefs, you name it.

Into all that, the lectionary drops these texts that we read today. These texts today are filled with love. But not the hearts and flowers and boxes of chocolates kind of love that we associate with Valentines' Day. The love in these texts is not romantic at all.

It is not even the deeply felt love of mothers for their children and children for our mothers that we celebrate today on Mother's Day - often with more cards and flowers - although that is much closer.

The love that fills these texts is the *agape* unconditional love that God showers upon all of creation; love that God especially lavishes on all people. God's beloved ones, those named and claimed in their baptism and - dare we say it? - even those who do not acknowledge that God exists.

A quote I see repeated frequently, although I do not know who first said it, bears repeating again: *"We will never look into the eyes of someone God does not love."*

That is NOT because there are people we do not see that God does not love; but because God loves every single one of us. Every human being on earth - and every human being who has EVER lived. What a staggering, exhilarating; life, love, and faith-changing realization!

Near the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, he told his disciples that he would be leaving them; that he would be handed over, lifted up, giving up his life for others. The disciples did not know what to think or what to do when Jesus told them he would be leaving them. So he took time to teach them.

Today's gospel text is from his last conversation with the disciples; after the Last Supper and just before he was handed over to the authorities. And what did he take time to emphasize to them in those last hours?

Not what to do to prevent his death or who to trust; not about fear or revenge, but love. Jesus tells them - and us - to abide in him and his love. And to love one another always.

I am not sure we really know anymore what it means to abide in anything. We live in a society that flits from one new thing, one trend or gadget, to another. In his paraphrase of scripture, **The Message**, the late Eugene Peterson wrote Jesus' words a bit differently, in a way that might help us understand:

Jesus said: *"I've loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you'll remain intimately at home in my love. That's what I've done—kept my Father's commands and made myself at home in his love... [Always] remember...: Love one another."*

When we make ourselves at home in Jesus' love, we accept the precious gift of friendship that Jesus offers us. That is a gift that we would never presume to expect or deserve, but one that Jesus offers us freely and we can accept with joy.

By loving Jesus and others, we live into the relationship that our Savior creates for us. It will change our lives here and now, and for eternity.

When making ourselves at home in Jesus' love and friendship, and loving others, we will also bear fruit. Good fruit. We will live in hope rather than fear, sharing hope and good news with others. We will care for those in need, providing food and clothing and all kinds of necessities. We will provide an example of faithful living that inspires and encourages others.

But Jesus tells us that the most important thing is simply to love others. Not just the ones that agree with us; or the ones that look like us, or act like us. To make ourselves at home in the love that Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, has for us, so that we can share that unconditional *agape* love with everyone we encounter.

Then we will grow stronger together in love as a faith community, we will bear fruit that will strengthen others, and we will feel at home in the loving friendship that Jesus offers to each of us. Amen.

Hymn of the Day ELW # 742 / LBW # 439 *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Nicene Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:

**We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God, begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.**

**For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary
and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,*
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Alive in the risen Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we bring our prayers before God who promises to hear us and answer in steadfast love.

A brief silence.

Loving God, you call us to be your fruit-bearing church. Strengthen the bonds among all Christian churches. Today we pray for our ecumenical partners.
Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Creating God, the earth praises you. The seas roar and the hills sing for joy. Fill the earth with your love so that by their song, all creatures of land and sea and sky, burrowing and soaring, may call us to join with them in praise. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Faithful Savior, you conquer the world not with weapons but with undying love. Plant your word in the hearts of the nations' leaders and give them your Spirit, so that the peoples of the world may live in peace. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Caring Healer, you forget no one and accompany the lonely. Be present with those who are sick or suffering especially those we name now. Provide for those needing homes or medical care and point us towards life-changing responses to these needs in our own communities. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Gracious God, as a mother comforts her child, you comfort us. Bless mothers and mothering people in our lives. Comfort those who miss their mothers, mothers who grieve, those who grieve because they cannot be mothers, and those who have never known a loving mother. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Gentle Redeemer, all who die in you abide in your presence forever. We remember with thanksgiving those who shared your love throughout their lives. Keep us united with them in your lasting love. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

In the hope of new life in Christ, we raise our prayers to you, trusting in your never-ending goodness and mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Closing Hymn ELW # 619 / LBW # 352 *I Know That My Redeemer Lives*

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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Today's reflection was written by Pastor Ruth Ann Sipe.