

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski

Sixth Sunday of Easter - May 9, 2021

Words of Welcome

Seems I am having another week where a song comes to mind regarding scripture, this time it is the Beatles *All you need is love*. Sorry if you now have a song stuck in your head! Songs, novel, movies of all genres throughout the centuries talk of love. The Bible might be well be called God's love story with human kind. Our conversation is about Jesus commanding his disciples to love. One might wonder how you can command someone to love and have that love be genuine, but in Christ this is possible. Stay awhile as we take a look at Jesus' command to love one another.

Call to Worship

Beloved, we are called to love one another, because love is from God.

God's love is poured in us from our birth.

We are called to extend the love of God to all people.

God's love is taught to us through the witness of God's faithful people.

We are called to proclaim God's love in all that we say and do.

In all creation, in all our relationships, may God's love be made known.

<https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/2749/worship-connection-may-9-2021>

Hymn

A new commandment (sing twice)

225

A new commandment I give unto you,
that you love one another as I have loved you,
that you love one another as I have loved you.
By this shall all know you are my disciples:
if you have love one for another;
by this shall all know you are my disciples:
if you have love one for another.

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Holy God,

The power of your love is beyond comprehension,
the breadth of your compassion without measure.

In Jesus Christ, you have met us in the midst of life's joys and challenges
and shown us what it means to love and be loved.

You have entrusted us with the greatest commandment
to love one another as Christ has loved us.

In this time of worship, we offer you our love and loyalty,
seeking to learn more of what love and loyalty mean for us

in the midst of our joys and challenges.

Receive our prayers and praise,

and through the power of your Spirit, draw us closer to you

and closer to each other as friends and followers of Christ, our Risen Lord.

Merciful God,

We confess we often find it difficult to love others as you commanded.

Though we intend to do your will, our priorities lead us in other directions.

We seek our own security before the well-being of others.

We fulfill our own desires rather than act for the common good.

We justify our own interests and fail to understand the cost they take on the earth and other people.

Forgive us.

Redirect our priorities and renew our commitment to live out your love even when it demands more of us than we expect.

Lord, we long for your wisdom and truth. Send your Holy Spirit to guide us as we listen. Prepare our ears to hear your Word and our hearts to receive it. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

The commandment that we have from Christ Jesus

is that we love one another,

treating each other as beloved brothers and sisters.

Abide in God's eternal love.

Let its power and joy penetrate your hearts and spirits,

preparing you for new growth in the Spirit.

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Scripture Reading John 15:9-17

⁹As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. ¹²"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

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The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message As I have loved you

This Sunday is Mother's Day. It is a day that we celebrate the love of our mothers. It is a generational love. I think of my own mom, giving thanks for her presence in my life. She was not a perfect person, but I knew that she loved me, and I often grieve, not her death, as I trust that she is in the loving arms of God, but rather I grieve the loss of her presence in my life. Phone calls between us are no longer part of my week. It is also a day that I consider my own life as a mother, knowing that I too have been far from perfect, but trusting that my children know how much and how deeply I love them.

Not everyone has had the opportunity for such a relationship with the one who brought them into the world. Moms can be as troubled and broken as anyone, so may not have the capacity for the love that we like to celebrate with Hallmark cards and breakfast in bed. When we have not experienced deep and abiding love from a parent, and even when we have, it can be difficult to get our minds wrapped around the love that Jesus is talking about in this scripture reading from the Gospel of John.

John 15:9-17 could use a little context. First of all, this follows from the scripture about Jesus being the true vine as he spoke about those who abide in the vine bearing much fruit. If you want to know more about that check out the service from May 2nd. The whole passage is also part of what is known as Jesus' farewell discourse. Jesus knows that his life is nearing its end and so is imparting to the disciples the last of his teachings, but also giving reassurance and promises. This commandment to love also comes between Jesus' foretelling of his betrayal by Judas, and when Peter denies that he knows Jesus, after Jesus was arrested.

So, if you are inclined to remove this passage from its context you miss out on the true nature of this sacrificial love set within the relationship of love between God the Father and the Son, and understood through the lens of friendship. This is not a fluffy, good-vibes, or euphoric love. This is love set in the messiness of life. True love for another person, even someone that you have pledged your life too, is not going to be easy and without struggle. In fact, true love will test your limits and boundaries.

Still, it is always important for me to say and for you to hear that if you are in an abusive relationship, that is not love, it is messy, but it is not love. It is power and domination over another. Sacrificial love, which looks to the well being, health and wholeness of another, well, that is getting closer to what Jesus is sharing here.

There is a gentleman here in Thunder Bay that I do not know personally, but he has given his life to the well being of children and to families of those who are underprivileged, most of whom are indigenous. Peter Panetta runs the Underground Gym. Our congregation makes a yearly donation toward the work of this place that is a home away from home for at risk youth. He loves sacrificially, giving of time, money,

energy, organizing, and making sure there is food, supplies, love, and joy in the lives of those who come to him. That is his calling, that is his purpose. This has not been without much challenge; in November 2019 a fire made the building unusable and then in April 2020 a break in and theft of 90% of the gym's property certainly left a painful hole.

Yet, Peter never gave up hope that he could once again serve the children and youth, and even with Covid the Gym has opened in a new location as people stepped up donating to the cost of the building, and still others are generously giving materials, time, talent, and whatever is needed to make this a safe place for youth in great need and at great risk.

Peter is not a perfect person, but he seems to me to be an example of the love that Jesus was talking about when he commanded us to love one another as I have loved you. This does not mean that you or I are to be another Peter and certainly not another Jesus, but each of us is called to love others. It is our task to figure out how that will be lived out in our own lives.

Depending on the season of your life, loving another as Jesus loved may mean being creative, caring, and sacrificing for your partner who is struggling with mental, physical, and/or emotional challenges. Some people do it as part of their vocation as teachers, health care professionals, lawyers, small business owners and many other professions that directly touch the lives of others who do not have means. Many of us need to be more aware of the lives and challenges that others face giving from our resources of finances, personality, talents, or interests that would serve to lift others up, giving them hope, love, and a place of safety whether physically or emotionally.

This is a conversation in which actions truly do speak louder than words and it comes from Jesus' own example. When Jesus says, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" he not only says it but does it. He speaks boldly and openly to all and anyone, and he lives what he says, but it all comes out of a place of love. When we preach that God is love, it comes out of the truth of Jesus being who he says he is and doing what he teaches others to do.

One might wonder where the freedom to love comes in all the talk of commandments, but it the freedom to love because of the love the Father has for Jesus, Jesus has for us, and Jesus desires for us. Once we can get our minds around the words and actions of Jesus for us, we can begin to see how the commandment to love one another as I have loved you might be lived out in our own lives.

Jesus loves us as friends, making known to us, trusting us, with everything that he heard from his Father. Being in relationship with the disciples and now us is something that Jesus chooses because of love. The hope is that we will love one another and that our love that flows, from God and Jesus, will flow to others.

I recall from my interview before being offered and then accepting the position of minister at St. Andrew's I said, "If you are looking for someone to get butts in the pew, you have the wrong person, but if by our love butts land in the pew, then I am all in." I still stand by that statement as I struggle myself to love as Jesus loved.

This is no easy way to do this because it is sacrificial love, it is meant to be costly, and that cost is usually more than money and often has nothing to do with money. It is a personal cost, just like Jesus gave of himself, we give of ourselves. We will not do it perfectly and it may often be messy. Having said that, we are not someone else's saviour. Only Jesus is saviour, but we are called to live lives that touch others with hope, grace, acceptance, assurance, and service. It is in this way that we bear fruit, fruit that will last, and because of that we will experience the joy of Jesus in us and our joy will be complete.

This happens, in Christ, with Christ and only through Christ. Amen.

Prayers of the People

God of our lives and our loving,
We thank you for the signs of resurrection that are all around us,
showing that life is stronger than death.
Give us the grace to recognize and embrace the gifts of new life
that your love makes possible for us all,
as we pray for your resurrecting power to renew the world amid all its challenges.

God of home and family, today we thank you for our families,
especially for our mothers and grandmothers.
We are grateful for their love and attention, their hard work
and the deep hope they have cherished for each one of us.
We honour before you each mother, grandmother and great grandmother
who has died; and we pray for all those who have felt isolated from their families
in these months of pandemic. Reunite us in your love.

God of connections and compassion,
Today we thank you for our friends and relations,
for the neighbours and fellow citizens who help to make our lives complete.
We thank you for smiles shared, helping hands offered, commitments honoured. And
we pray for all those around us who are facing particular challenges this day...
(Keep a brief silence)

Restore our hope with your love.

God of courage and new possibility,
Today we pray for all those who have felt life or love slipping through their fingers in
the times of distancing we've had to endure, and for those who have struggled with

their physical or mental health, whatever the reason. We pray for communities trying to sort out how to recover from the pandemic and for all those worried about their personal future. Encourage us with your love.

God of forgiveness and renewal:

Today we pray for those whose relationships are in need of repair and for all who work for peace and reconciliation in the face of deep divisions. We pray for families, churches, communities and countries facing conflict, and ask that your Spirit open hearts and minds to deeper understanding. Reconcile us through your love.

As friends and followers of Jesus, we offer the words he taught us, precious to the whole family that claims his love:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Invitation to make an offering

There are people from different churches and places following this service. As you present your offering to God this day to your church community, we give thanks for the gift of life renewed through Christ's love, asking God to bless us and the gifts we bring so that our lives may reflect the hope and renewal we have found in Christ throughout our community and in the world God loves.

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If you would like to learn more about St. Andrew's, get involved in our ministry and work, or make a donation toward the life and ministry of St. Andrew's Presbyterian, in Thunder Bay visit our website at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> for more information or to connect with me.

Hymn

We are one in the Spirit

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1. We are One in The Spirit, we are One in the Lord,
we are One in The Spirit, we are One in the Lord,
and we pray that all unity will one day be restored,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our Love,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love.

2. We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand,
we will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand,
and together we'll spread the news that God is in our land,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our Love,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love.
3. We will work with each other, we will work side by side,
we will work with each other, we will work side by side,
and we'll guard each one's dignity and save each one's pride,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our Love,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love.
4. All praise to the Father, from whom all things come,
and all praise to Christ Jesus, who is God's only Son,
and all praise to the Spirit, who makes us one,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our Love,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love.

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Benediction

Friends and Beloved of Christ,
you have been chosen to go into this world with the message of God's love.
Bear fruit of hope and joy, peace and justice, with all that you meet.
May God's peace be with you all.

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