

THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF LOVE
5 Easter, May 6, 2007, Grace Church, Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close

The collect (opening prayer) for this morning tells us to know God is everlasting live, and to know Jesus is to know the way to truth and life. It comes with a greater challenge for us ... that is to follow in Jesus' footsteps. The Christian way for us is the way of Love. The new commandment that Jesus leaves with us is to love one another as we have been loved. This is a special kind of love. The Greek in the New Testament that is used for this love is "agape." It is a self-giving, sacrificial love. This is the type of love that we are to model in our lives and in our Church.

The Gospel of John today contains what is called the "Farewell Discourse" of Jesus. It is the time right before Jesus' crucifixion and death. Jesus is intent on teaching his disciples what it means to be a community grounded in both God and love. Jesus says it starts in community, here and now. Love has to begin here. This love has the power to transform us and make us different. It is then up to us to spread this love into the world.

We might start by asking ourselves this morning what loving things we have done. We must remember that agape, love, is an ACTION ... not just a feeling. Where have we seen love lately? Where has God shown us this powerful, transforming and life-giving love?

This past week, I officiated at the funeral of Guy Scott on Tuesday. His son got up to give the eulogy. When he pulled out the 12 typed pages I thought to myself, "Yikes!" I had this vision of a long, drawn out and morbid speech. But it turned out to be a moving testament from a son about his father. It had humor and profound insight into the unique man who was Guy. I saw in it deep and shared love and thoughtful reflection by a son on his father's life.

One of the stories that were shared was how Guy Senior took Guy junior for long walks. He would carry a penny with him and hide it in a tree or by a rock. He would tell his son that they would come back in a year to see if the penny was still in its place. Sure enough, each year it would be there! It was a simple, loving action, but deeply meaningful. This is the nature of love.

Now Guy Junior can't wait for his daughter to be born so when she grows older, he can take her for walks and hide the pennies. From one generation to another, there are the shared walks, the shared pennies and the shared love. This is agape! This is love in action in community!

Why is it so hard for us to live agape love? One story that I came across help me to understand perhaps part of the problem in our day and age. Rev. Keith Wagner tells a story about "Time for Love" that illustrates the issue. A Princeton Seminary ethics professor advertised an extra class assignment for credit. 15 students showed up for the event. He divided the students into three groups of five. Then he gave them their instructions. To the first group, he said that they had 15 minutes to go to a certain spot on campus, and if they were not there on time, their grade would be affected. After they left, he spoke to the second group. He gave them the same instructions, but told them that they would have 45 minutes to get to the spot. After they left, the professor informed the last group that they had three hours to go to the same spot!

Unknown to the students, the professor had asked three drama students from the College to be part of the assignment. Each group would come upon the other students at various places along the way. The first one they encountered stood nearby with his hands covering his head. He was

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moaning in pain. Half way to the spot, another student lay on the ground; face down, apparently passed out. Finally, the last drama student was on the steps leading to the spot, supposedly having an epileptic fit!

What was the learning of this assignment? No one from the first group stopped to help any of the people in distress. Of the second group, only two of the five students stopped to assist the people in need. From the last group, all of the students stopped and helped the other students in need! What is the moral of this story? When we are too busy, living with tight and impossible deadlines and to task oriented, we have no time to love!

We are more concerned with making a deadline than we are with helping others. (Remember, that these were seminary students, further clergy!). No one seems immune from the obsessions of our culture. We don't make enough time to love. We let too much of the world crowd in and push love out. How can love transform us, and the world, if we don't make room for love to be part of our lives?

Love is an action! Yes, it takes time ... but it alone has the power to transform us! To be a Christian is to love. To LOVE is to ACT! If we don't make time to love, we are missing God's active and life-changing spirit in our lives.

Dr. Walter Wink tells a story of Archbishop Desmond Tutu that is a testament to this kind of love. In South Africa, at the height of apartheid, Tutu was walking by a construction site. A temporary sidewalk had been built but was only big enough for one person at a time. Tutu entered it, but a white man appeared at the other end of it. The white man recognized the black Archbishop. He growled, "I don't make way for gorillas." Tutu jumped aside, made a sweeping gesture with his arms and responded, "Ah yes! But I do!" This loving act defused a confrontational situation. What did it cost Tutu? Not much. How was the other changed? We may never know ... but the possibilities are great!

Love is not a suggestion, nor a recommendation or advice. Love for us as Christians is an expectation! Jesus directs the disciples, as us, with a commandment to act ... to love. What we witness in the Gospel is the climax of Jesus' earthly ministry ... and a new teaching for how we will be God's new community. It's really simple ... the bottom line for Christians is that we are to love!

There's a song that sums it up for us today. "And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love, yes ... they'll know we are Christians by our love!" Jesus calls out to us to love. He calls us to be a community that lives, shares and acts out of love. So what loving act will we do for this community ... and then for the world?