



Love One Another
Sermon May 15, 2022
Nativity Lutheran Church
ELCA Deacon, Michelle Mehan

Grace and peace to you this day for our Lord and savior Jesus Christ.

I don't always understand the placement of the readings in the lectionary. The last three weeks we have seen Jesus appear to the disciples multiple times. He appeared in their room, he appeared at the lakeside when they were fishing, and he even cooked fish for them. In this week's gospel we are back at the Last Supper. Perhaps this jump back in time is to keep us alert. Keeps us focused on what is presented. How often we get too comfortable with routine and don't really listen. So here we see in this Gospel a reading which isn't very long, 4 verses, with some very powerful and strong words.

Here John tells us that Judas had gone out. The implication is that Judas had gone out to betray Jesus. The plan was in motion. So Jesus had washed the disciples feet, he ate with them and shared fellowship, community and time together. Jesus then addresses the disciples "LITTLE CHILDREN." Does anyone else think that is odd? These are grown men, his disciples, his friends whom he has worked closely with. And he addresses them as "LITTLE CHILDREN."

As I reflected on this during the week I thought about that night, the time gathered around the table. How many of you remember being gathered around the family table on many a Sunday. We would sit for hours, the food, the stories, the sharing. The connections from being together. The wisdom of the stories being passed down from one generation to the next. They passed on how to be together. The people were not perfect, each had their faults and we loved each other. It's like the grandma or father or uncle or aunt who addresses the younger ones and calls them by a term of endearment. No matter how big or old they will get, they will always be that special one to them. Little Children brings up the

connotation of being open, being welcomed, being free. Jesus is addressing his disciples with a term of endearment. Jesus knew the disciples gathered around that table were not perfect. He knew Peter would deny him not once but three times. He knew that they would fall asleep in the garden.

Jesus said Love one another. No parable, no story. Just the words Love one Another. 3 words. Those 3 words are the core of what we are called to do. It is in living out those 3 words that will show the world who we are. It is a core skill that must be developed, exercised and lived. Nothing else matters if we can't or don't or won't do this. Think of it like a circle love one another. Love one another is the center circle. That is our circle here at Nativity. Then it is wrapped with another circle and another circle. Yet we can't reach out to the next level of circles until we have been able to the first one. Kim teaches math and I listen to her stories about how until the students have mastered the basics nothing else she tries to teach matters or will make any sense.

Nadia Bolz-Weber, a Lutheran Pastor, author, now called to the role Pastor of Public Witness in the Rocky Mountain Synod wrote: Never once did Jesus scan the room for the best example of Holy Living and send that person out to tell others about him. He always sent stumblers and sinners. I find that comforting. (end quote)

I find that comforting too. I am not perfect, I fail often, I sin daily and in spite of that, I am a beloved child of God who is called and sent to love.

So my question is how are we, you, me and Nativity doing at Loving One Another?

The first response I hear is: "I love my church family....." Do we really?

What did Jesus mean by Love One Another? Let's explore those words. What words come to mind when we live the words of Love One Another? Respect, Honor, Care, Compassion, Serve. We can get caught up by the word Love.

Jesus meant Love as an action, NOT a mushy romantic hallmark saying. Our purpose in Loving one another is to serve one another. Jesus gave us example

after example of service. Being in service and serving the other. Jesus healed, Jesus listened, Jesus welcomed, Jesus had the heart of a servant.

Mother Theresa led that life, Nelson Mandela let that life, Martin Luther King Jr., led that life. I am sure others come to mind for you as think of those who led a life of loving the other. We are commanded to Love. It is how we love that matters.

Joyce Rupp is a Catholic Sister and author of many books. I have had the privilege to train under Joyce in her Boundless Compassion program. I am a certified facilitator of her work. She believes that living a compassionate life is living a life of loving one another. The basic premise is: Compassion as a way of life. So may we use the word compassion and love together.

So when others observe our actions what do they see? Do they see Love and compassion? Do they see an attitude of respect and service? There is the saying, people will often forget your words but they will remember how you made them feel. How do we make others feel? Do we make them feel accepted, appreciated, like they matter?

I had the privilege to spend a lot of time with my mother during her illness and in the last days of her life. We talked about many things. I listened to her stories and we laughed, cried, sat in silence and played. One thing that she did was write a letter to each one of us kids, myself and my two brothers. She told me that once she died to go to the file cabinet and give them their letters. Each letter was hand written. I still have my letter and treasure it to this day. One thing my mom said to me was stay close to your brothers. She wanted us to Love One Another. If you were at our wedding you know that both my brothers escorted me down the aisle. My one brother has since died and my other brother lives in San Diego. We are separated by distance however we text everyday and talk every Sunday. When I have had a particularly hard day he reminds me that he is my number one fan. He loves me.

So our command to Love One Another is not a one and done thing. It is not a check the box, done that. It is an everyday commitment. A choice we make everyday to love. When it gets hard to love and we feel we don't have the energy or think that it matters, remember the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross for us and how tenderly he addressed his disciples. Little Children. So too he addresses

us. He understands our fear and challenges. Let us Love One Another as Jesus Commanded.

In the Revelation passage today the words read so eloquently. So beautiful. Then I say really, this world? This world that is torn with hate and war, people seeking power and control, fear and pain. Senseless shootings everywhere. Where is this place?

We get caught up in the idea that once we die and get to heaven all will be well. This world and earth will not have mattered. We talk about living our Resurrection promises. I understand that. We say we have to endure our trials here until we get to heaven. How about we take this passage from Revelation and believe these words that once we are Jesus' children, his disciples, that our world has been made new. I am not saying there will not be pain and suffering. What I am saying is that we can get through the pain and suffering knowing that God is with us and God has the final word, the Alpha and Omega. Now let's try to connect these words from Revelation with the Gospel passage.

So life is hard, messy and complicated. It will have pain and sorrow. It will also have beauty and joy. It will have love and grace. It has both. So until we die and go to heaven and live those resurrection promises, how can we live the way we are told in the revelation passage?

St John of the Cross wrote in "A River of Suffering"

I saw the river over which every soul must pass to reach the kingdom of heaven, and the name of that river was suffering: and I saw the boat which carries souls across the river, and the name of that boat was love.

We all have our story and we all are more than what we are right now. We have things on our hearts that burden us. We hide what is hurting us. Yet behind your smile there can be pain and hurt. We are all making our way across the river of suffering and every one of us can benefit from being carried across that river in the boat of love.

We carry people across the river in the boat of love. This is how we live it. We love as a compassionate presence as Joyce Rupp speaks.

I work as a Palliative Care Chaplain at North Bay Hospital in New Port Richey. Everyday I see patients, families and staff confronted with hard decisions about care. Part of my role is to be a support when they are faced with these decisions. Do we continue treatment or do we stop? Do we terminally extubate or do we trach and peg? Do we sign a DNR or not? Those are some of the questions that come up as I sit with people everyday and be with help them and love them in their boat of suffering.

My days at the hospital never look the same. Last Friday morning I started with two end of life patients. Then I received a phone call from a Social Worker from one of the floors and she said your patient wants to go home with Hospice but before he goes home he wants to renew his marriage vows. Can you do that? So at the appointed time I went up to the patient's room and the patient, his beloved wife, the social worker, RN and myself were part of an amazing, sacred and holy time. There was not a dry eye in the space.

The following Monday we had been following a 38 year old patient who had been declared brain dead. The family decided as a final gift of life the patient would be an organ donor. Through this generous gift others would get a second chance at life. They do what is called an Honor Walk. Meaning the patient is wheeled to the operating room, with the family following behind and hospital staff line both sides of the hallway as the patient and family walk by. I pushed the mother of the patient in a wheelchair. When we got to the door of the operating room and it was time for the family to say their last good byes I provided support as best I could. Once the patient was taken to the operating room I escorted the family outside and sat with them for long time as they processed. I walked them to their cars when they were ready to leave. It is a humbling, hard and amazing experience to be a part of. I walked with that family. I was there in love for their suffering.

Theologian Michael Himes writes: Often it is thought, not least by theologians, that the theological task is to provide persuasive answers to religious questions. It is not. Theology's task is to clarify exactly how difficult, how puzzling, and how pressing the questions are.... Theology is at its most distorted when it convinces

us that all the pieces of our experience fit together, that all the puzzles are solved, that all the answers have been given, in short, when it does away with suffering. Faith that assures us that following Jesus means taking up a cross of precisely the right weight and walking a perfectly straight road is false faith... true faith demands that we see and feel how immensely deep and how darkly mysterious the experience of being a human being is. Religious faith does not take away suffering or make it easier.

Our world is hurting, people are suffering. How can you be there for someone in their suffering? How can we put aside our own fear to be with the other? This is what it means to Love one another. May we answer the call in LOVE.

May it be so. Amen.