

Fifth Sunday of Easter 2006

Texts: John 15:1-11
1 John 4:7-21

<http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/lectionary/BEaster/bEaster5.htm>

1 John 4:7-21

John expands on the nature and qualities of love as a key image for what defines Christian life. It is crucial to note that in the phrase, "God is love," it is the character of God that reveals what "love" is, and not our understandings of love that reveal who God is.

John 15:1-8 (extended to read to verse 11)

One of the "I am" passages where Jesus invites us to know him as the vine from whom and in whom we live.

Sermon in a Nut Shell

When we love one another as Jesus loves us, we first learn from Jesus what love is. And having experienced being loved by Jesus – had that love heal, restore and renew the loving that was already in us – we then love others the same way.

Sermon Thoughts (Not the Sermon)

Love

As much as I find myself often arguing against or puzzled by what John is writing, Chapter 15 of the Gospel according to John is currently one of my personal favourites.

In this passage, we learn much of the kind of relationship we are to have with Jesus: I am the Vine you are the branches; of how we must maintain that relationship: abiding in Jesus and following his commandments; and of what might result from that relationship: bearing fruit and experiencing joy.

The focus of both texts is on love, and today I want to very briefly offer a few reflections on love.

Catherine and I were talking the other day about what sort of a verb "love" is. Even though Catherine is a high school English teacher, she's not particularly big on grammar. Yet we realized that the grammar of the verb love is highly instructive.

For example, "love" can be either a transitive or intransitive verb. An intransitive verb is one where the subject is also the object of the verb. So for example, if someone says, "I love you" they may in fact only be talking about their own experience. They are really saying, "I am experiencing feelings of love for you," but you, on the other hand, may not be feeling much love from them. This kind of loving is really a kind of ego trip. "I" am in love.

In order for love to be a transitive verb, the one who is loved must experience the love. "I love you" ought to mean that I am behaving in ways that give you love. Just as "I feed you" ought to mean that I am giving you something that feeds you, so "I love you" ought to mean I am giving you something that nurtures you. This is what John means when he says that words without deeds are empty lies. Love expresses itself in behaviour that indeed is experienced by the other as love. Catherine and I make a point of remembering to say, "Thanks for loving me," as much as we say, "I love you."

However, loving someone is not the same as feeding them. When we feed someone, we usually give them something they don't have. But when we love someone, we don't give them something they don't have. Rather, we connect with something that is already in them.

Jesus kind of alludes to this when he talks about us abiding in him as he abides in God and God abides in him and he in us. This is not about giving us something we don't have, but is about connecting a circuit; connecting a flow of energy, purpose and life.

When Jesus says, "I have come that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete," he is trying to connect his joy with the joy that is already in us; to awaken our joy; to heal our joy; to give our joy new hope, a wider horizon, and a deeper grounding.

When we love one another as Jesus loves us, we first learn from Jesus what love is. And having experienced being loved by Jesus – had that love heal, restore and renew the loving that was already in us – we then love others the same way.

Today is Mother's Day. For some, today will be an unfettered day of thanks. For some, today will be a day of grief and loss; of unrealized hopes. And for some, it will be a day of resentment and anger. All our human attempts at loving will be frail and faulty. So today is not about guilt for not being perfect. Rather it is a day to open ourselves once again to the active, transitive, and transforming love that abides in us through Jesus as we abide in him.

God is what love is. Love abides in Jesus, and Jesus abides in us. Let us be open to the Love which abides in Jesus; let it abide in us; that being transformed ourselves, we may in turn love as we have been loved.

Thanks be to God for the transforming love lived in and through Jesus. This is good news for today. Amen.