

The 11th Commandment
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Acts 11: 19-30
Psalm 33: 1-8, 18-33
John 4: 7-21
John 15: 9-17

6 Easter
St. Peter's Church

“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.”

Who do you Love? How do you Love? Why do you Love? Who loves you? How do you know? If I could stand up here this morning and answer these questions I would be accomplishing what philosophers, poets, and song writers have been trying to do for centuries.

Puppy love, real love, true love. The emotion that fills your life ..makes you act stupid ..confuses ..satisfies ..entangles. Love is all around us. All we need is Love. *Love the one your with?*

We toss the word around like a football. It's used to convince us ..confuse us ..even to sell us. I love your hat. I love my car. I love my cat. I love you .. You're gonna' love this. I get exhausted just thinking about it.

The Greeks, in fact, had three different words for Love. Philia ..brotherly love (ah that's where the city of brotherly love got the idea); Eros (physical love) ..most of us heard that one abused usually in flashing neon ..and finally Agape ..the love between God and Man. “Perfect” Love ..unconditional Love ..Love that's seen in how we treat others ..God demonstrates this Love towards us.

With only one word for love we must combine all three of these concepts. We must realize that all creatures are our brothers ..or sisters. St. Francis, we're told, would remove brother worm from the road so he wouldn't be squished ..spoke to brother wolf ..and sister bird. Whether he did or didn't isn't the point ..the traditions of Francis are as instructive as his life. They are meant to focus our gratitude on the Creator so that we do not minimize ANY of his creations ..certainly not our fellow human beings.

Christ did not command us to love the other white people with round eyes ..He commanded that we love ALL of His creatures ..all humans ..all the animals ..birds ..fish ..all things on and above the earth ..all were made by him. Loving a

poisonous snake would seem to require that we avoid it ..let it slither in it's own space. Love, of course, might require us to protect a child from the snake.

Today we're talking about perfect love. The real thing. The Love of God. How does a culture that has minimized the meaning of the word learn to understand that.

"If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love."

Christ tells us that he says these things "so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." Ah ..now we're getting somewhere. Joy. Complete joy. We NEED the Love of God ..and, I believe, God NEEDS our Love ..so that HIS joy may be complete ...considering what HE did for us ..don't we owe HIM at least that much?

"Whoever does not Love ..does not know God for God IS Love." God's Love, St. John tells us, is revealed to us in the sacrifice of His son to save us from sin. If for no other reason ..we should love him in return. He even provided us with a simple set of instructions ..10 of them ..11 if you include "Love one another."

It seems to me that it's in the WAY that we love that we stray from the path. To begin with ..if we're going to Love others we need to Love ourselves. I'm not talking about the kind of self centered ..self absorbed love that requires that every act of love that we DO deserves an act of equally love in return. In fact, we're told to love even our enemies ..and that can really stretch the depth of our affection.

It's easy to love the people that love us ..but to love those who cheat, steal, lie, and do us every other kind of wrong requires that we dig deeper into our hearts ..that we imitate Christ ..so that His love will flow through us. We abide ..He provides.

St. Francis loved lepers ..lowest of the low in his lifetime. Christ ate with tax collectors and women of questionable virtue. As Father Tom pointed out last week ..the ability to love ..across the board ..is the distinguishing mark of the Christian.

Each time we repeat the Creed we claim that we believe what HE has told us ..each time we act in some way contrary to HIS teachings ..we make ourselves a liar.

We cannot simply choose those parts of Christ's teachings that we are comfortable with. We must embrace all of it ..Live ALL of it.

That's tough sometimes. The husband or wife who cheats ..makes a lie of love. The Christian who treats members of the opposite sex as little more than a delightful quickie makes a lie of love. The Christian who beats children ..or, for that matter, helpless animals ..makes a lie of love.

The TRUTH of our life in Christ is manifest in the way others see us living it ..in the way they perceive us. Again .. St. Francis .."preach the Gospel at all times ..if necessary use words."

John tells us .."those who say: I love God, and hate their brothers and sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister *whom they HAVE seen*, cannot love God *whom they HAVE NOT seen*."

The love needs also to be in our hearts. God knows our hearts. If we withdraw from those whom we fear or don't understand ..if we "loath" secretly rather than loving openly ..we're as guilty as the wife beater.

God is available to teach us to love. To heal our hearts. We have the intelligence ..He gave it to us ..all we have to do is ask for the healing. I am not promising or even suggesting an instant change ..in can take time to get over ourselves ..but we CAN do it.

As we embrace the love of the savior His love embraces us. As we fill our hearts and our minds with the knowledge and love of Christ ..our hearts and our minds change ..and our lives follow suit.

This morning, as you kneel for the laying on of hands ..after the anointing that reminds us of what we were given at Baptism .."marked as Christ's own forever" ..let us pray for the healing required for our bodies and minds ..but let us also pray for the healing of our heart ..of our spirit ..that we may truly learn to love one another.

It doesn't matter what kind of mess you've made of your LOVE LIFE. No matter how deep the sin that separates you from Christ ..you can be made whole.

If we pray for the Agape Love and practice the Philia love ..the Eros love will take care of itself.

So .. Love the One ..*who's WITH You*.

Pray for it. Work on it ..and your joy can be complete ..God's too.

AMEN