

## **"As I Have Loved You" – John 15:9-17 – May 6, 2018**

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Today's gospel lesson talks about love. It's not the sentimental, warm fuzzy kind of love that requires a pleasant feeling toward someone. When John talks about love, he doesn't mean an emotion; for John, love is always an action. And when Jesus talks about love, love is a way of life for a disciple; it is a commandment. Love is about doing, not feeling. When we choose to follow Jesus, we are choosing to embark on a lifelong journey of growing in love – love the action, not love the feeling. If we were to rely simply on feeling, we wouldn't get anywhere. Active love requires commitment, effort and follow-through.

The love that John talks about in his gospel, and the love that Jesus commands his disciples to live out, is really about how we relate to one another. How we live in our relationships. Not just with family. Not just with friends. Now just within our local or church community. But in our relationships with everyone. It's about how we relate to every other person on this earth.

The tricky part is, that every relationship that we have has some feeling attached to it. Every time we meet a person or hear about a person, we feel something. When the feeling is positive it is easy to act in loving ways toward that person. When the feelings are neutral or apathetic, loving action becomes a tad more difficult. When the feelings are negative, acting in love is a much more an arduous task. The commandment to love insists - action must trump feeling. Withholding love or avoiding love are not options.

Let me say that again. Withholding love or avoiding love are not options. For instance – have you ever avoided getting involved with something because you felt like it didn't pertain to you? Not my business. Not my concern. Not my issue. I didn't cause the problem, so why should I try to fix it? It doesn't apply to me, so I don't care. Now, I'm not talking about getting up in someone's business. I'm talking about issues of justice – when the rights of others are being suppressed. The commandment to love goes beyond the concerns of our own little world of existence. It reaches out to the greater world, to every person loved by God.

This past week I was struck by a story that hit the news. Perhaps you heard about it. Two teenage brothers drove from New Mexico to Colorado State University to participate in a campus tour. The older brother, having finished a year at community college, was considering a transfer to the school. Arriving late, they tour already in progress. A woman who was a parent participating in the tour group called 911 on the boys, because they arrived late, they were quiet, and they were wearing black clothing with strange symbols and words. She claimed they made her nervous. She said they were Mexican, when in fact they were Native-American. Two quiet boys, who made no threats, but who had arrived late and had brown skin made her nervous. So she called the police.

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/05/04/us/colorado-state-university-racial-profiling-trnd/index.html>

The boys only crime was looking different from the woman. She could not see past the color of their skin.

Similar stories have popped up in the recent news. Two black men were arrested in a Starbucks in Philadelphia because they were sitting at a table, waiting for a business contact to arrive before placing their order. They had already been refused admission into the restroom. The manager called police because they were supposedly trespassing. After they were handcuffed, their acquaintance arrived, shocked by what had transpired. Their only crime – having brown skin.

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/17/health/implicit-bias-philadelphia-starbucks/index.html>

These and stories like them are troubling. They illustrate the human tendency to react with fear, bias against, and suspicion toward people who look different or are part of a different group than we are. This problem has always existed. But due in part to social media and video-recording, we are able to witness it more easily, with a simple click on our smart phones. We can no longer hide from the reality of racism, or every other -ism under the sun. And if we listen to what Jesus has to say to us, we cannot ignore the problems faced by those who are not part of the "in crowd." So as you start to see the bigger picture and the implications of this commandment to love, you realize it's not a simple task. It's not something we can ever complete and then move on to something else. It is a continual way of being – something we work at every day. And likely, it's something we fail at every day. But friends, failure doesn't mean we quit trying. We acknowledge our mistake and get right back to it.

Friends, we are on a journey together toward experiencing the life of wholeness that God desires for each and every one of us. God started us on this journey by first loving us and then claiming us in our baptism. In our promise to follow Jesus Christ and live lives of discipleship to him, we have committed ourselves to living lives of love in action. And oh, what a journey it is!