

“If You Love Me...” – John 14:15-21 – May 17, 2020

Rev. Rachel A. Wann

In these six verses from John’s gospel, there is much being said by Jesus. Knowing what is befall him in just a few hours’ time, he prepares his disciples for what is to come. Oftentimes, we miss the true depth of a proclamation in the moment that it is uttered, but the weight of its profundity is felt long after the conversation has concluded. So much that is here in the few verses can only be fully understood when taken in the entirety of the message of the good news of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of God’s promise to redeem humanity. It’s a powerful word that Jesus gives here.

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. Though I am going away, you will receive an Advocate, the Spirit, who will remain with you forever. You are now and always will be loved. And because you are loved you will love one another. And by loving one another you will know that God abides in you, and I will be revealed in love.

It’s a never-ending cycle of love. This love is not simply a warm, gushy feeling or sentimental but empty expressions of good will, it is active, alive, always moving forward, always revealing Jesus in those who give and in those who receive that love in action.

In this particular moment, as we continue our lives together while apart, in the uncertainty of pandemic, it can be hard to see love in action. Especially when it seems as though some things are beginning to unravel. As the turmoil drags on, tensions continue to escalate, and the divisions within society are perhaps more pronounced than ever. As new information about this particular virus becomes known, its complexity is baffling to those of us who just want answers now. The simple cure that was hoped for a few months ago seems more and more unlikely. The plans for the days ahead, so carefully drawn up, are whisked away in partisan bickering.

People are scared, tired, frustrated, frantic, bored, hurting. The spread of misinformation only makes the situation worse, as sides begin to draw their lines in the sand, refusing to give even an inch to the other side. It’s hard to love someone whose belief system is so different from our own. It is even harder to love someone when the opposing beliefs are a threat to one’s safety or one’s livelihood. The reality is there are no easy answers. But to remain divided will certainly lead to more turmoil and pain for those on all sides.

How do we actively love someone who doesn’t care whether we live or die?

That is the wrong question. In it, we are already putting a qualification on love, by trying to assess one’s worthiness to receive our love. In effect, we’re saying, they don’t care whether we live or die, so they are unworthy of our love.

The right question is – how do we actively love someone? Love cannot occur in a vacuum. To truly love requires some type of relationship, a seeking out to know, to understand, to

empathize with the other. Even when the other has absolutely no desire to show love in return. Love does not seek recompense. True acts of love are freely given.

Now, I know what you're thinking – that I'm telling you this as if it were easy to do. It isn't. Did you ever wonder why Jesus said, when you care for someone – feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, binding up the wounded – you know, that whole Matthew 25 thing – that when we do those acts of love, it's as if we're doing it for Jesus himself – it's because of this. We can't love someone like that, unless Jesus is present. We need him. We need his Spirit to abide in us, to love us, so that we can love him in others.

Loving others is hard work, especially when we are already stretched thin by the uncertainty of the situation in which we find ourselves. Stressful times can bring out both the best in people and the worst, and we have seen both sides. And maybe we have seen both sides within ourselves.

So perhaps the first step for any of us to take toward loving others, is to recognize the others' humanity. Jesus said to his disciples that he loved them and would not leave them orphaned. Jesus says that also to each of us. We are not alone. The Spirit is with us. Perhaps, when we begin to recognize that Jesus not only loves us but also loves "them," we will see that that which divides us, will never be as strong as that which can bring us together.